Corporate conceptions of sustainable developmentin New Zealand:: a critical analysis

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Corporate Conceptions of Sustainable Development in New Zealand:

A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Critical Theory and Foucauldian Theory are employed to construct an epistemological framework from which to critique different theoretical conversations about sustainable development and to tell a contextually grounded story about business and sustainable development in New Zealand. It is concluded that management theory and the 'green business' literature present a case for 'management' of the construct that has itself become part of the 'problem', constructing 'sustainable development' as 'political sustainability'. The structural causes of unsustainable development and unsustainable business fail to be problematised, providing a gap that this research explores. The emerging 'critical' literature is reviewed; and a research matrix constructed from the epistemological framework provides a 'weak-strong' heuristic for the empirical investigation. The matrix and the heuristic drive the questions for the empirical investigation and the analysis of the evidence.

The discourse in construction at business level and in the broader social context is also largely driven by the management paradigm. It appears that hegemonic élites have coalesced around this paradigm to control what constitutes the discourse of sustainable development. However, the prevailing narrative of 'management', excluding a more dialectical discourse, is itself meeting contestation. It focuses on the economic and environmental imperatives of sustainable development, paying scant attention to the radical social agenda at the heart of the concept; and overlooks the institutional imperative of sustainable development. The inquiry reveals that this hegemonic appropriation is incomplete, and that emerging counter-hegemonic views are already challenging the dominant paradigm.

The conclusion reached is that a more dialectical and inclusive discourse about sustainable development is required that opens the way for democratic participation. Some indications from the empirical research suggest that this might be driven through democratic social movements focusing on local sustainability and alternative means of production and consumption. An important role for business as a 'stakeholder' in this discourse calls for the replacement of asymmetric power by discursive democracy.

CONTENTS

Declaration

No part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university.

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List of Abbreviations

ANZSIC	Australia New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification
BCSD	Business Council for Sustainable Development
BusinessNZ	Business New Zealand (Formerly the Manufacturers' Federation and the Employers' Federation)
ICC	International Chamber of Commerce
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
MED	Ministry of Economic Development
MfE	Ministry for the Environment
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
NZBCSD	New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development
NZCIC	New Zealand Chemicals Industry Council
NZCTU	New Zealand Council of Trade Unions
NZBR	New Zealand Business Roundtable
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCNZ	Packaging Council of New Zealand
PCE	Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment
PRISM	Pacific Rim Institute for Sustainable Management
TNCs	Transnational Corporations
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development

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Preface

My thesis is largely written in the first person in order to underline the personal nature of the journey undertaken through the research process and the reflexivity that became a feature of that process. It is one story, told from a particular perspective reflecting my own positionality and the nature of the learning that I undertook as researcher. At the end of the journey, I was a different researcher, and, in some ways, a different person.

Chapter One

A Discourse of Business and Sustainable Development

> ... it takes a lot of things to change the world:
> Anger and tenacity. Science and imagination,
> The quick initiative, the long reflection,
> The cold patience and the infinite perseverance,
> The understanding of the particular case and the understanding of the ensemble:
> Only the lessons of reality can teach us to transform reality.
>
> Bertolt Brecht: *Einverstandnis.*

1.1 Introduction

My dissertation provides an account of a programme of research, framed broadly in Critical Theory, that explores ways in which the concept of sustainable development has been constructed at international level and how it is conceptualised in companies and the broader business context in New Zealand. A number of concerns prompted the inquiry and made it topical. Previous research[1] had revealed that no other research in the area, framed in Critical Theory, had been carried out in New Zealand; and, until quite recently, the international literature on business and sustainable development had generally lacked a critical perspective (Welford, 1998). However, a newly emerging critical discourse, to which I aspired to contribute, provided a challenge (Levy, 1997; Newton and Harte, 1997). In addition, a developing critical perspective on management theory, while not yet fully addressing sustainable development, strengthened the critical approach to research on business (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). All of this represented a research opportunity for my own study based in the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School and seeking to tell a counter-hegemonic and emancipatory story of business and sustainable development in New Zealand.

Concerns arising from the New Zealand context were based on the fact that, over a period of nearly ten years, since UNCED in 1992, the semantics and rhetoric of the sustainable development debate had been adopted in some areas of business and its context in what presented as a constrained and constraining manner, more associated

[1] The inquiry presented here forms part of a longer-term research engagement with companies, providing one 'episode' in the ongoing programme.

with gate-keeping, domination, power and control than with emancipation. No discursive construction of how sustainable development might contribute to 'the good life' in New Zealand had yet emerged. These concerns about 'gate-keeping' reflected allegations in the international literature that the business interest in sustainable development represents little more than the economic capture or appropriation of the concept (Rowell, 1996; Beder, 1997; Mayhew, 1997; Welford, 1997a); and the parallel view that government interests might work to subvert a concept that imposes environmental limits on primary economic goals, or, at least, see sustainable development as a means of promoting its own agendas (Munton, 1997). The perceived danger was of 'gatekeepers' dominating and 'framing' the discourse (Eder, 1996b), exercising power to control both 'decision-making' and 'nondecision-making' (Lukes, 1974), with little discursive problematisation of the concept or public involvement. This suggested that New Zealand might be developing what O'Mahoney and Skillington (1996) characterise as 'processes of competition between collectively mobilised agents who struggle to impose their interpretations on the situation, and to dominate the social rules affecting environmental decision-making' (p. 46). It appeared that a Habermasian 'technocratic élite' (Bernstein, 1985) might be seizing the embryonic debate on sustainable development to control its content and its 'silences'. This countered the construction of sustainable development as a democratic principle requiring the political involvement of all stakeholders; and the belief that it is the substantive value of that participation, not 'stakeholder engagement' as the means to an end, that counts (Jacobs, 1991). It made it difficult for others to gain an understanding of the discourse of sustainable development; or of the institutional arrangements and instruments that were constructing it (Lukes, 1974). The 'gatekeepers' in New Zealand appeared to comprise members of government departments and self-appointed guardians of 'business and sustainable development'[2] who worked closely together, and whose focus was apparently on 'political sustainability'.[3] An important consideration was whether this group might, in fact, represent a *catalyst* for discursive problematisation of the concept of sustainable development and a more

[2] As far as membership of such a group could be recognised, it appeared to comprise the Ministry for the Environment, the New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development and a Crown Research Institute, with other 'sustainable business' groupings and a number of consultants.

[3] The concept of 'political sustainability' is problematised in Chapter Four.

emancipatory discourse; or whether it was, indeed, an 'inner circle' of potential 'gatekeepers' that would inhibit the dialectical discourse: that is, a force of control, power and domination, intent on promoting their own agendas (Munton, 1997). There was little to reveal that the group existed; nor was it transparent how its constituency had been determined, or how its members conceived of sustainable development beyond the fact that an alliance had been forged with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), which presaged a focus on 'eco-efficiency'.

It seemed unlikely that such a hierarchical and exclusive coalition might expand the discourse of sustainable development, or develop the 'truth-making' which is at the heart of discourse (Gerber, 1997). Such an 'inner circle' of gatekeepers might act as an inhibitor to discursivity; and representing, as they did, largely 'traditional' interests, such as government and business actors, they had little interest in permitting newcomers into their circle, or in granting them a right to exert influence (Slöterdijk, 1984, cited in O'Mahoney and Skillington, 1996). It also seemed possible that these agents were emerging to take advantage of *'the business* of business and sustainable development', just as *'the business* of business and the environment' had flourished before it. A thriving 'industry' of environmental management consultancy has done little to further the discourse on or understanding of issues of sustainable development (Newton and Harte, 1997); and nothing to problematise the concept or to place it within the public discourse. A 'core idea' of the discourse of sustainable development – that of *democratic participation* – was apparently being overlooked. This situation and my ongoing work with companies raised some of the issues that I decided to explore in the research inquiry; and this led me to seek a theoretical re-contextualisation for the research that would help me to answer questions about who held power over decision-making about business and sustainable development in New Zealand. The thrust of the research inquiry was to oppose such hegemony, seeing sustainable development as having the potential to develop the consensual premises of communicative action (Habermas, 1972; 1984), to act as a driver for dialogical innovations and to contribute to deliberative democracy (O'Mahoney and Skillington, 1996; Dryzek, 2000). These emancipatory aspects of the discourse of sustainable development are examined in Chapter Three,

and their relevance to the discourse within New Zealand is discussed in the analysis of the empirical investigation in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine.

Another concern associated with the lack of robust debate was that the term, 'sustainable development', might become no more than a cliché – 'a fashionable phrase that everyone pays homage to but nobody cares to define' (Lélé, 1991:607); what Tolba (1984) terms a 'shibboleth' or an article of faith, much used but rarely explained. This gave impetus to my decision to explore and attempt to clarify and articulate the conceptions of sustainable development held within the business context in New Zealand and how these were being framed. As Kirman-Martin[4] notes (1999), the broad societal context in which the business discourse has developed is vital to the nature of that discourse, affecting it in profound ways (see also Luhmann, 1989). Examining the conceptions of sustainable development held in the broader context, including the administrative role of government departments, therefore became another focus of my research. The concern about 'capture' determined that as wide and open a discourse as possible should be promulgated within the research programme. These areas of research and the discursive approach to be taken also led me to construct a theory that would facilitate and enhance such explorations as part of a programme of emancipatory research.

In other ways, too, my research commenced at an interesting 'moment' in the New Zealand political and social environment, and this is explored more fully in Chapter Eight. Briefly, fifteen years of rightist, extreme free-market liberalism by both right and left factions had created the beginnings of its own demise through new levels of social division and dysfunction, increasing poverty, structural unemployment, and the appropriation of much New Zealand business by international corporations (Kelsey, 1999; Jesson, 1999). The fact that environmental legislation was weakly enforced in the face of a tenacious myth of a 'clean and green' New Zealand was increasingly being exposed (Szabo, 1993; Mandow, 2000; Gendall, et al., 2001; Young, 2001), while business opposition to the major environmental legislation

[4] The perception that the discourse within New Zealand was, perhaps, already captured had been explored by Kirman-Martin (1999) in her (embargoed) doctoral research on Mandatory Environmental Reporting (MER) in New Zealand.

represented by the Resource Management Act 1991[5], was still being fanned by free-market liberals (McShane, 1998[6] cited in Kelsey, 1999). However, public disenchantment with the free-market myth brought a change of government at the commencement of my research in 1999 in the form of a Labour-Alliance Coalition, with a small Green Party playing a pivotal role in Parliament. The new Coalition Government promised a return to traditional values and to 'closing the gaps'[7] of social and racial inequity in New Zealand. These issues presented a critical 'moment' and a high degree of timeliness for my research and its goal of examining conceptions of sustainable development through a dialectical process of critical reflection.

I had also introduced an annual national survey of levels of environmental responsiveness in top New Zealand companies by turnover in 1999, using a UK model[8] which provided companies with the benchmarks that had been lacking for levels of strategic environmental planning, and a basis for environmental reporting. This not only filled a gap in the New Zealand data on environmental responsibility in companies, but was employed as a process of 'infiltration' (Punch, 1986; 1994) to open up the discourse with companies in my programme of intensive research.[9] The Survey itself tended to crystallize some of the attitudes towards 'newcomers' or 'competition' that typify 'inner circles' such as the one referred to. After three successful administrations of the Survey and high-profile launches of the annual

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[5] The New Zealand Resource Management Act 1991 represents the country's major environmental legislation. From its inception as the Resource Management Bill, it was faced with contestation from business lobbies. The influence business had on the framing of the Act, and continues to try to exert, is commented on in Chapter Seven.

[6] In the Minister for the Environment's (1998) 'Think Piece': *Land Use Controls under the Resource Management Act.* Ministry for the Environment: Wellington.

[7] New Zealand Coalition Government: Coalition Agreement, 1999; '*Closing the Gaps'* Report, 1999.

[8] The New Zealand Survey of Corporate Environmental Responsiveness, administered annually to top companies by turnover, is based on the UK Survey of Corporate Environmental Engagement, run with FTSE companies by Business in the Environment, a section of Business in the Community.

[9] Although an example, in some ways, of an eco-modernist approach to working with companies, the Survey proved a very effective 'incitement to discourse' (Foucault, 1981). The access and acceptance thus negotiated became my 'passport': it gained a 'privileged' status within companies as critical outsider/insider which also opened up a possible role in promoting a critical, emancipatory discourse. An intensive programme of research, employing some aspects of Habermas' 'ideal speech situation' (1972) and of Foucault's 'technologies of the self' (1988), characterised the empirical work with this group.

Report, the Survey was also subjected to political attempts to stop, deflect or capture the work, regardless of (or because of) the important function it had provided and the industry support that had been garnered. This again suggested that the fundamental democratic principle of sustainable development was ill-conceived of in New Zealand: and that the 'competitive advantage' being urged on companies as the driver for sustainable development might also be motivating its 'champions'. It meant that 'gatekeepers' (Argyris, 1969; Van Maanen, 1988; Punch, 1994) also presented areas of tension for the politics and ethics of the research. This defined for me a politically engaged research dialectic (Welch, 1991; Punch, 1994), indicating sensitive political and ethical elements that would have to be resolved situationally (Punch, 1994), particularly as some companies and other participants in the research samples were involved with this group.

A considerable research literature has set out the international debate on the dialectics of sustainable development and its problematic.[10] Theoretical frameworks and perspectives from a particularly rich dialectic have been applied to the problematic and critiqued, including discourses from the environmental debate, environmental philosophy, theories of gender and race, deep ecology, green political theory (Merchant, 1994) and the newly emerging discourses of eco-socialism/ecological socialism and sustainable capitalism (O'Connor, 1998). In addition, since UNCED in 1992, the business literature itself has produced a canon of work on 'business and environment' and 'business and sustainable development', to be critically assessed in Chapters Four and Five.[11] I had originally considered that this represented the theoretical conversation within which I would locate my own research and to which I would contribute. However, my positionality as researcher and my ontological perspective on sustainable development called for a different

[10] See, for example: The Ecologist, 1972, 1993; Meadows et al., 1972, 1993; O'Riordan, 1981, 1988; WCED, 1987; Lovelock, 1988; Daly and Cobb, 1989; Pezzey, 1989; Dovers, 1989; Milbrath, 1989; Adams, 1990; Pearce et al., 1990; Rees, 1990; Jacobs, 1991; IUCN, UNEP, WWF, 1991; Lélé, 1991; Holmberg et al., 1991; Holmberg, 1992; Holmberg and Sandbrook, 1992; Mannion and Bowlby, 1992; Goodland et al, 1992; Ekins, 1992, 1993; Carley and Christie, 1992; Sachs, 1993; Redclift, 1987, 1991, 1992, 1996; Eckersley, 1992; O'Connor, M., 1994; Redclift and Benton, 1994; Kirkby et al., 1995; Reid, 1995; Beder, 1996; O'Connor, J., 1998; Dryzek, 2000.

[11] For example, Davis, 1991; Schmidheiny, 1992a; Willums and Golüke, 1992; Ledgerwood et al., 1992; Welford and Gouldson, 1993; Wheatley, 1993; Cannon, 1994, 1996; Taylor et al., 1994; Cairncross, 1995; Welford, 1995, 1996, 1997; Elkington, 1997; WBCSD, 1996; McIntosh, et al. 1998, to mention only a few.

theorisation that examined issues of asymmetry of power over the concept of sustainable development and, ultimately, questions of emancipation and democracy. The 'green' business discourse, on the other hand, produces what I critique as a new 'green business orthodoxy' that contributes to 'political sustainability' (Levy, 1997). It is dependent on an extended managerialist paradigm (Sunderlin, 1995), fitting a framework of eco-modernism (Hajer, 1995). I now contend that this green orthodoxy, lacking a critical perspective, might itself have contributed to the alleged capture of the concept of sustainable development by business.

This chapter introduces the broad theoretical framework within which the story told in the thesis may be understood. It provides a reflexive account of my experience that helped to shape the ontological, epistemological and axiological basis of the dissertation and that guided my theorisation of the study. The aim of this and the following Chapter is therefore to position the discourse within a dialectical process employing concepts from Marxism and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. Since there is no single way of constructing society's social relationships to nature (Demirović, 1994:271), I have also chosen to draw upon concepts from several philosophies that enrich my own theory. My research framework draws upon the broader 'critical' tradition, including Foucauldian theory and other non-totalising readings which help to explore 'absences' and 'silences' in the meta-narrative in a dialectical manner. It is argued that only an alternative grand narrative envisioning a different world order can lead us out of one scripted for domination, injustice and environmental destruction. However, such a narrative needs to be constructed as a 'polyphonic' grand narrative allowing for dialogue, diversity and contestation (Bakhtin: 1981), one that is immersed in the process of dialectical discourse.

This broader approach enables me to take into account complementarity between different meta-narratives and to develop my 'emergent' approach to theory, though still framed within Critical Theory. The re-framing of the theoretical and empirical motivations for the research changed the nature of my chosen investigation and drove a new orientation for the research questions. These shifted the focus from the managerial *'what?'* and *'how?'* of companies undertaking the shift to sustainable development to the more fundamental issue of the ideological conceptions held about sustainable development and the narratives that these constructed.

1.2 Establishing the Research Focus

The epistemological starting point for my research is the proposition that the much-contested construct of sustainable development may provide the ontological key to challenge capitalist domination of the natural and human domains of life. It considers whether a radical conception of sustainable development may have the power to illuminate a new meta-theory for natural and social emancipation, and envision 'a socially and environmentally just, equitable and ecologically rational society' (O'Connor, 1998:256; Gare, 1997). It suggests that sustainable development may become part of the deliberative turn to a more discursive theory of democracy (Dryzek, 2000),[12] whereby, through a process of dialectical discourse, sustainable development could contribute to a new, more inclusive, theory of 'the good life'. Considerations of environment, equity and ethical issues – factors it is difficult to 'value' – would be inherent to the theory. I also take account of the counter position that 'sustainable development' is a construct of the eco-modernist[13] positivist paradigm (Escobar, 1996; Sunderlin, 1995), a vehicle for continued 'political sustainability' (Levy, 1997),[14] being itself based in modernity, utilitarianism, scientism and a Weberian paradigm of 'management' (Sunderlin, 1995). This appeared to be the construction that the 'hegemonic coalition' in New Zealand was promulgating.

My central position was also developed with an awareness of the post-modern challenges to 'utopias', grand narratives and dreams of emancipation (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996). However, the 'chaos' of post-modern relativism and the anti-idealism

[12] However, Dryzek is more inclined to see sustainable development as being 'accommodated' to the capitalist economic system.

[13] Ecological Modernisation Theory has been the subject of strong contestation since it emerged in the 1980s. It is dismissed by some commentators as a 'techno-managerialist' discourse that legitimates the neo-liberal free trade and modernization agenda. Others see it as having a more radical potential for democratic government and strong sustainability (Pepper, 1999). The position taken here focuses on the tendency for the eco-modernisation literature and business practice to rely on the 'managerialist' imperative and to ignore the radical agenda of sustainable development.

[14] Basing his theory on the Gramscian concept of hegemony, Levy (1997) sees 'environmental management' (EM) as representing business' accommodation to the threat environmental problems pose to dominant hegemonic coalitions, of which business is a major partner, legitimizing the primacy of corporate management's role in addressing environmental problems and constructing 'managerial capture' of the agenda.

of much post-modern theory has contributed little to prevent gaps between wealth and poverty and damage to the life-support systems of the world increasing (O'Connor, 1998); while moral and political compassion suggest that no 'good life' can be attained without a *stated* vision and commitment.[15] The dominant discursive practices of our time *do already* represent a meta-theory or grand narrative that is all-pervasive. It is based upon a positivist, structuralist ideology that champions economic rationalism: free markets, free trade and materialistic development and 'progress' (Marcuse, 1964; Aplin, 1997). This dominant narrative reveals oppressive authoritarian and bureaucratic social control exercised to a large extent through mass propaganda and 'culture industries' (Marcuse, op. cit.; Willmott, 1994a; Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:70). It is based upon the rationalisation and technocratization fostered by science, technology, administration and the rule of 'experts' who colonize the life-world of people (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:74).

This is the commitment that forms the epistemological, moral and intellectual basis of my dissertation. A framework based in critical social theory is chosen to provide a foundation for reassessing the potential of sustainable development to bring about emancipation of nature and human nature from the domination of a capitalist political economy. Other possible epistemological frameworks were considered, as discussed in Chapter Two; but were finally rejected in favour of the 'fit' that the chosen framework provided. The decision to position the research within a dialectical discourse employing concepts from Marxism and from the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School is endorsed by O'Connor (1998:xi): 'the main contours of world economy today can be practically read off the theoretical lines found in Marx's classic text'. Dryzek (2000:20) suggests that critical theory, in its broadest sense, is concerned with charting the progressive emancipation of individuals and societies from oppressive forces that are ideological contingencies rather than structural necessities. Through dialectical discourse people may come to understand how such forces are themselves contingent: they are constructs that may be opposed and

[15] Postmodernism argues against the power of 'grand narratives' (Marxism, Weberism), suggesting these should be replaced by multiple voices and local politics over theoretical frameworks and large-scale political projects (Clegg et al., 1996). My research sets out to explore the notion that 'sustainable development' could represent the new 'grand narrative', replacing the dominant narrative that exists *a priori* through a democratic process of dialectical discourse, but inclusive of 'multiple voices' and 'local politics' through deliberative democracy.

counteracted through inclusive participation in 'authentically' democratic politics. Within this framework, I have carried out an examination of how the concept of sustainable development has evolved and been framed in the international discourse, as well as the conceptions of sustainable development constructed within the business discourse. This is preceded by a problematisation of the theories from Marxism, neo-Marxism and the Frankfurt School to examine their contribution to the nature-society dialectics, in order to determine what, from these theories, was relevant to my research task. The possibility of emancipatory praxis stemming from research based in Critical Theory has been contested (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994; Bronner, 1994); but there are also arguments that the Critical Theory (CT) of the Frankfurt School (and especially participatory research in the traditions of Freire and Gramsci), may advance praxis. Important for my research was the perspective that CT themes of ideology, power, domination, organisation structure, rationality and communication can instruct organisational research practice by *expanding concerns* beyond 'managerial' problems (Steffy and Grimes, 1986).

1.3 The Researcher and Reflexivity

No research orientation arises from the purity of a vacuum, and part of my 'accountability' as researcher is to provide an account of my own actions and intentions and my political and values orientation as being fundamental to the research.[16] The route that brought me to the present research, the allegiances that have influenced my choice of topic and the ontological, epistemological, moral and political frameworks within which I have elected to conduct critical research are briefly overviewed here. Firstly, a background in the humanities and social sciences influenced my perspectives on the environmental problematic, education, business education and my conceptions of the role of business in the transition to sustainable development. English literature, particularly a specialist interest in the Romantic period, introduced me to the dialectics of nature and society. In many ways, the Romantics led the reaction against changing values which had turned away from a

[16] Schweiker (1993:206) makes the point: 'If we cannot determine our lives by norms and values that are in some sense our own, can we really speak of being ourselves in any profound sense? Without this kind of reflexivity it is difficult to understand our normal intuitions about ourselves and the significance of our lives, let alone our discourse about moral agents.'

human relationship with nature, and exposed the impacts upon nature and human nature that the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions and a capitalist political economy were effecting. Several forecast the ecological devastation, the increasing division between wealth and poverty and the capture and disempowerment of the working class by means of a culture of consumption which we see as part of the environmental and human crisis today.[17]

As a teacher, I had also confronted the role of state education in sustaining and reinforcing societal hegemony rather than exercising its potential emancipatory power.[18] I saw that the education system 'performs most activities that are necessary for the production of labour power' (O'Connor, 1998:149); and this 'economic' role means that schools not only preserve and distribute the economic property of society, but also safeguard its symbolic property and therefore its cultural capital:[19] they are the agents of cultural as well as ideological hegemony (Apple, 1979:6). This hegemonic purpose illustrates Gramsci's thesis (1971) that hegemony 'saturates the commonsense consciousness and practices of our lives'.[20] Through their 'overt',

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[17] Wordsworth, part of the English Romantic movement which to some extent defined itself against instrumental concepts of the Enlightenment (O'Connor, 1998:21), and who had himself been caught up in the revolutionary zeal that challenged the prevailing political ideology of France during the Revolution, was one who perceived the potential effects of a developing consumerist society based upon the role of the 'possessive individual':

> 'The World is too much with us; late and soon
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
> Little we see in Nature that is ours;
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!'
>
> William Wordsworth, Sonnet XXX111. Published 1807.

[18] My dissertation for the degree of Master of Philosophy examined the school's role in the social reproduction of the dominant ideology, and the fact that, while teachers cling to their 'ameliorative' philosophies of what schools do (Apple, 1979), state control over education means that schools are set up to serve the needs of the labour market and the dominant group in capitalist society, not to emancipate teachers or students.

[19] The distribution of the cultural capital of a society through education is carried out through hegemony – 'a whole body of practices and expectations ... our shaping perceptions of ourselves and the world. It is ... in the strongest sense, a 'culture', but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes.' (Williams, 1977).

[20] Boggs (1976) defines the concept of hegemony as used by Gramsci as: 'the permeation throughout civil society – including a whole range of structures and activities like trade unions, schools, the churches, and the family – of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs, morality ... that is in one way or another supportive of the established order and the class interests that dominate it. Hegemony is diffused by the agencies of social control and socialisation in every area of daily life ...'. It connotes 'a congruence of material and ideological forces that enable a coalition of interests to maintain a dominant position in society' (Levy, 1997: 129).

'covert' and 'null' curricula, schools act as a main agency of transmission for the process of 'ideological saturation' (Apple, 1979:5). False consciousness – the *consent* of the dominated to the ideological control of the dominant class - is achieved by making this asymmetrical control appear 'common-sense': the 'only way' to do things (Ramsay, 1983:17).[21] In addition, my work as a social worker and counsellor had provided experience of structural and systemic problems being presented as 'panopticisms' whereby the limitations of the system were presented as 'personal', and people were encouraged to 'own' problems not of their creating.

These insights and the moral stance they inform laid the basis for my future work in environmental and business education, where similar hegemonic controls operate and where the same emancipatory potential exists. Working directly in the ideologically-charged area of environmental education for more than a decade confirmed that this is a particularly political and contested area of education, where hegemonic influences are supremely powerful (Huckle, 1996; Huckle and Sterling, 1996): and one where even environmental groups practise their own forms of power and domination (Harvey, 1997). Those who control a state curriculum will strongly resist the development of environmental education as emancipatory education within that curriculum; but tolerate it as a 'soft' embellishment of the supposedly neutral but instrumental science curriculum, or as a component of the 'technical' education that capital demands. This underlined that 'gatekeepers' capture and define the limits of discourse in a potentially political area of education; that 'circles of conversation' (Luhmann, 1989) determine who will be included and who excluded; and that 'firewalling' techniques may be used by the gatekeepers to ward off 'outsiders'. It prepared me for an important aspect of the research on business and sustainable development. I needed to ascertain the extent to which the discourse of sustainable development in New Zealand was being defined, constrained, or 'owned' by government-appointed and self-appointed gatekeepers;[22] to what extent these groups

[21] Critics of Marxist scholars, such as Giroux (1988), do see schools as venues of hope and 'sites of resistance and democratic possibility through the concerted efforts among teachers and students to work within a liberatory pedagogical framework' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994:139).

[22] Harvey (1996) points out that part of the theoretical and empirical task of the dialectical researcher is to identify where 'gatekeeping' or other mechanisms of control might be constructed in order to give a 'thing' or system the 'qualities of identity, integrity and relative stability' (p. 55), thus safeguarding the status quo.

were themselves controlled by the interests of capital; and how those seeking a more discursive or critical engagement might be excluded. The extent to which the parameters of the sustainable development discourse were so defined and controlled had implications for the ideal of an inclusive dialectical process in the research.

Moving into a College of Business, and coming to grips with the business education curriculum, with its basis in organisation and management theory, revealed the low priority accorded sustainable development in the business education discourse in New Zealand and internationally (World Resources Institute (WRI), 1998, 1999; Forum for the Future, 1998). The rootedness of organisational theory in modernity and scientific rationalism was a challenge to teaching and research in 'business and sustainable development'.[23] There is a reluctance, not only among business school academics, to step outside mainstream orthodoxy, including resistance to interdisciplinary and non-traditional pedagogical approaches (Springett and Kearins, 2001). Criticism has come from within the business discipline itself. Much management theory has been categorised as self-referential, even 'tunnel-visioned and dangerous – practically as well as intellectually, ecologically as well as culturally' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992:3); it has been condemned as suffering from a 'fractured epistemology' which 'separates humanity from nature and truth from morality' (Gladwin et al., 1995:874). Schools of business are perceived as 'key socializing agencies for the intelligentsia of advanced capitalist societies' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:204). If these criticisms characterise business education, they also help to explain the institutional resistance of business itself to any fundamental or structural shift to sustainable development.

These were some of the experiences that helped to shape the values, attitudes, beliefs and goals that I brought to my research on business and sustainable development. They influenced my choice of questions and my consciously adopting a social science perspective and a framework based chiefly in Critical Theory which would help me to explore how power is held over decision-making and 'nondecision'-

[23] It also has to be acknowledged that the challenge partly arises from the market-driven values of tertiary institutions themselves and their espousal of a management culture based upon competition rather than progressive educational values (Huckle, 1996; Ralston Saul, 1997). It also rests in the reductionism of tertiary curricula in all disciplines (Capra, 1983; Gladwin et al., 1995).

making (Lukes, 1974). My premise is that, at the heart of sustainability, there is a concern for equity, justice and 'the good life'; and that goals of inter- and intra-generational justice and environmental sustainability mark the need for a radical shift in current organisational and institutional management. Such a shift predicates considerable social upset as redistribution of the 'goods' (not only tangible) of what has come to represent the 'good life' takes place, and as the focus of social and economic systems radically changes.

There were also questions about what my alignment with a 'political radical' position implied for my research with managers in capitalist corporations. I saw the role as drawing upon Gramsci's classification of the 'organic' intellectual[24] where the potential exists to develop a counter-hegemonic movement by 'active participation in practical life', enabling people to see the world in a new way (Gramsci, 1971). This offered a more emancipatory role, in keeping with a social constructionist viewpoint that problematises conceptions of society and offers alternative visions. Some claim that the emancipatory promise of Critical Theory has lost much of its earlier allure *precisely because* it has proved unwilling to actively engage in praxis - in the practicalities of the positions it espouses (Bronner, 1994:325). It was therefore important to clarify my own political and epistemological orientations, and to declare these as essential to the research and the course it took. Applying Gramsci's theory of the centrality of 'workers' self-understanding of experience' (Gramsci, 1971) places the researcher and those researched in the same framework of critical self-reflection. The counter-hegemonic role of the 'organic' intellectual as researcher has an emancipatory part to play in helping others to choose to see the world in a different way and to uncover any 'capture' of the concept of sustainable development by institutional hegemony from the business sphere or its social context.

[24] In Gramsci's classification of intellectuals into 'traditional' and 'organic', the former are seen as 'functionaries' with close allegiance to their own tradition and craft, practising under what they believe to be a rhetoric of autonomy (Gramsci in Cammett, 1967; Gramsci, 1995). 'Organic' intellectuals, on the other hand, enable people, through the provision of an alternative ideological framework, to possibly resolve dual consciousness by 'seeing the world in a new way'.

1.4 The Dialectical Discourse

> ... a discourse is by definition a shared set of assumptions and capabilities embedded in language that enables its adherents to assemble bits of sensory information that come their way into coherent wholes. Because discourses are social as well as personal, they act as sources of order by co-ordinating the behaviour of individuals who subscribe to them.
>
> John Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond,* 2000 [25]

My goal was to set the critical analysis that informs my research within a dialectical discourse which provides 'a more plausible and adequate basis for the foundational beliefs that make interpretation and political action meaningful, creative and possible' (Harvey, 1996:2). This decision was key to my theorisation of the research where the objective was to provide a critique of 'reified' and 'naturalised' conceptions of sustainable development. It called for a political commitment and required 'critical ways to think about how differences in ecological, cultural, economic, political and social conditions get produced' (Harvey, 1996:2). The environmental and development debates encapsulated in 'sustainable development' are 'not only *constituted by* but *constitutive of ... socio-ecological and political-economic processes'* (Harvey, op. cit., p. 6, original emphasis). A dialectical and relational approach provided a counter to the positivist and simple empiricist mode which has characterised much of the enquiry into both business practice (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Gladwin et al, 1995) and the environmental debate. It helped me to deconstruct some simplistic narratives of sustainable development currently promulgated in New Zealand.

The dialectical approach differs from the epistemological one, where we examine the attributes of things in order to determine processes (Harvey, 1996); and this also influenced my theoretical stance. It may also explain why some of the critique of business and its impact on the environment has been relatively impotent – it has focused upon *'things'* that business does and *'impacts'* that it has, and the

[25] However, as noted, Dryzek (2000) does not see sustainable development as necessarily forming a part of the deliberative turn to a more discursive democracy on account of its *accommodation* to the capitalist economic system; although he does acknowledge that there is a radicalisation of the discourse developing that might make it part of the discursive turn, and concedes that the concept seems 'reasonably conducive to democracy' as it emphasises the role of a transnational civil society (p. 123). It is that 'radicalisation' of the discourse that is aspired to here.

'management' of these. Dialectical reasoning, on the other hand, calls for a focus upon process: it is discursive and can reveal the unexpected ways in which the legitimation of techniques of domination that result in environmental impacts is maintained (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). The technocratic focus also explains why business sees its own and the environment's salvation in 'eco-efficiency' and technological advancements. These, in themselves, do not provide answers where broader social and ecological processes are not addressed (von Weiszäcker et al., 1997):[26] they will only maintain and legitimate 'greener business as usual'.

The dialectical approach was essential to my research, where the hegemonic power of capitalism and its domination of nature and human nature are contested. For one thing, dialectical thinking underlines the ontological principle that 'elements, things, structures and systems' do not exist outside or prior to the processes, flows and relations that create, sustain or *undermine* them (Harvey, 1996). They are social constructs, subject to the dialectical principle that *'change is characteristic of all systems and all aspects of systems'* (Harvey, 1996:54, emphasis added).[27] This meant that constructs that participants took for granted, such as 'capitalism', the 'capitalist economy' that supports business, and global corporate networks, were not treated as unproblematic or invulnerable. Capitalism's constructions can be deconstructed, 'creatively' if the conditions are right and agreed to. It has its own internal contradictions, and all of its 'fixed and frozen' categories such as corporations and global networks - and their conceptions of sustainable development – are contingencies that are capable of dissolution. The dialectical approach provided the potential to uncover different conceptions of sustainable development constructed within companies and the broader social context in New Zealand and to examine the processes that underpin their construction. It also made it possible to consider the variety of 'moral' stances held by people within organisations, and the way that

[26] Technologies that conserve or create resources do comprise only a *stop-gap* where more fundamental values shifts have not been addressed (von Weiszäcker et al., 1997, Chapter 14.3:296, 'Markets Are Not a Substitute for Ethics, Religion and Civilisation').

[27] Levins and Lewontin (1985: 280) state: 'The dialectical view insists that persistence and equilibrium are not the natural state of things but require explanation, which must be sought in the action of opposing forces.' Ollman (1990, cited in Harvey, 1996:55) comments: '... given that change is always part of what things are, [our] research problem [can] only be how, when and into what [things or systems] change and why they sometimes appear not to change.'

'corporate' values can succeed in stifling personally held values and conceptions of sustainable development, at least within the workplace (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996).

Integral to dialectical thinking, therefore, is the exploration of 'possible worlds', reflecting a motif of Marxian dialectical thinking: the exploration of potential for change, for self-realization and the construction of new collective identities and social orders. Dialectical inquiry incorporates ethical, moral and political choices into its own process. The explicitly value-laden nature of this form of inquiry reinforced my own preference for praxis and for the research to have outcomes – 'to make a difference' – as well as my interest in the role of education and 'educator' in the research. The dialectical approach helped me to 'reconstruct theory', to theorize what would be meant by the goals of 'sustainable business' and a 'sustainable New Zealand' – that is, to construct a general theory of dialectical discourse about business and sustainable development. This involved answering the question: 'Where do my loyalties lie?' and acknowledging that my political and theoretical activity was 'embedded' in an 'intimate culture' that had brought me to the current research project. The aspects of Foucauldian perspective I adopted in the research meant that the question of power surfaced in terms of whom the different discourses of sustainable development serve, so that discourse analysis provided a way of examining the mechanics of power.

1.5 The Research Idea

The above account of my research interests helps to explain my positionality as researcher and the theorization determined on for the research inquiry; the way in which the research problem became reconstructed; and the nature of the questions that were explored. This re-theorisation is examined and a level of auto-critique provided in Chapter Ten, where I reflect on the research process, its outcomes and the impact on myself as researcher. Part of the research 'problem' that emerged was that, historically, the formal Northern discourse on the 'global problèmatique' has been pervaded by constructions of nature/environment based in natural science theory, repressing the understanding of the fundamental causes of the crisis as being

based in the capitalist political economy. The discourse of political economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had taken the same form as the discourse of natural history (Foucault, 1984a); and the construction of 'nature' and of 'political economy' within the same scientific paradigm may be part of the problematic we are dealing with. The science-based construction of nature was matched by the scientism/instrumentalism of business theory as that evolved. Both are rooted in modernism, indicating a reason why the environmental discourse has relied heavily upon legislation for any impact upon business; and why the business appropriation of sustainable development has not been difficult to effect. Environmentalism itself has not offered an alternative paradigm to that of business orthodoxy. For some years, 'environmentalism' has provided relatively little repositioning[28] in a modernist discourse where environment and business theoretically reflected each other in fundamental ways, not least in the 'managerialism' which became common to their approaches (Sunderlin, 1995; Levy, 1997; Newton and Harte, 1997; Fineman, 1996a, 1996b, 1998; Fineman and Sturdy, 1999). The re-location of the environmental debate in a 'social reconstruction' of nature and sustainable development which emerged in the late 1980s (Redclift, 1987) is examined as the possible turning point in the environment/sustainable development discourse, one which also brought the dialectics of environment into the purview of modern Critical Theorists. One research goal was to problematise the definition and construction of sustainable development that pervaded the Brundtland Report, 1987, and constructions that have emerged post-Brundtland. This problematisation of the contested discourse of sustainable development revealed a central dichotomy that is key to this inquiry and which produced the 'weak-strong' heuristic that underpins the empirical research. One position argues that sustainable development is the 'creation' of the capitalist business paradigm, intended to promote 'weak sustainability' through business-as-usual. The other sees the concept as a construction that promotes 'strong' sustainability and sustainable development as part of a radical agenda for participatory democracy, equity and eco-justice.

[28] Sachs et al (1993) comment on how the original emphasis placed on 'values' by the environment movement changed to an agenda of 'management'.

The central dichotomy is integral to the critique of the 'green business' theory. This discourse, emerging in the late 1980s, is critiqued and problematised, the argument being posed that, while it raised awareness and led to significant improvements in environmental management, it was largely based in scientism and managerialism. It advocated eco-modernism and 'political sustainability' rather than a paradigm shift to sustainable development (Levy, 1997). The axiological basis of early 'green business theory' offered little in way of a vision of a sustainable future or any shift from the domination of the instrumental paradigm. This helps to explain the purported 'appropriation' of sustainable development by business, equating the concept to 'eco-efficient business-as-usual'. While business has readily picked up some of the semantics of sustainable development, green business theorists have also played a tricky game of trying to influence business and to 'normalise' the sustainable development agenda by using business' own metaphors.[29] A critique of the metaphors of the 'business case' and the ensuing conflation of language became a focus of the research inquiry. The charge of business' appropriation of sustainable development is examined (for example, Beder, 1997; Welford, 1997; Korten, 1995; Rowell, 1996; Stauber and Rampton, 1995); as is the emerging critique that explores whether the discourse of 'green business theory' has itself encouraged that 'appropriation' (Levy, 1997), and whether using the language of business may represent unwitting submission to the control of business.

The business discourse which re-examines management theory and organisational studies from a Critical Theory perspective is overviewed, and it is argued that this important shift in re-theorizing business and management has so far paid only lip-service to the sustainable development-business debate.[30] [31] This indicates a gap in the research discourse which my research has set out to bridge. Further, it is

[29] Hence the proliferation of terms such as 'the triple bottom line', 'triple dividends', 'the five-gear shift', 'win-win-win' (Elkington, 1997; 1998; 1999; 2000).

[30] In *Doing Critical Management Research* (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000), despite the reiteration of the importance of sustainable development as a focus of critical theorising of business issues, only two such philosophies are referred to, those of Shrivastava (*'Eco-centric Management'*, 1995) and Stead and Stead (*Management for a Small Planet,* 1992).

[31] The focus has been upon the 'traditional' areas of business and business education – issues to do with human resource management (Townley, 1993); organizational theory and corporate culture (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Clegg and Dunkerley, 1980; Alvesson, 1987; Alvesson and Willmott, 1996); but not addressing the fundamental importance of sustainable development for business in a more just society.

proposed that a business discourse based in Critical Theory which addresses itself to issues of sustainable development and sustainable business is now needed to conceptualise more effective ways of bringing about the epistemological and ontological changes necessary for business to move to sustainability. The goal of my research was to contribute to this emerging 'critical' problematisation of business and sustainable development (see, for example, Levy, 1997; Newton and Harte, 1997). The dichotomy at the heart of sustainable development is also important in the examination of the central role that corporations have played in shaping the discourse since 1987; and an examination is made of the ways in which corporate power has to some extent appropriated the agenda of sustainable development, although it is argued that this hegemonic appropriation is, as yet, incomplete.

This critique represents the dialectical context for my empirical research on conceptions of sustainable development held by employees at senior career levels in New Zealand companies and by key actors in the New Zealand social context of business. Through this theorisation, I examine how conceptions of sustainable development are constructed and 'framed' into narratives of business and sustainable development, and seek out any commonalities between the discourses, and between these and the international discourse on sustainable development. The original intention to provide an examination of written and spoken accounts of sustainable development, followed by a company case study, was radically changed by the re-theorisation of the inquiry. The three 'stories' this approach would effectively have provided were replaced by a thematic approach that focuses much more closely on the key themes that essentially arise from the theorisation.

1.6 Research Questions and Dissertation Structure

The thesis addresses a series of questions in an attempt to answer the two 'grand tour' research questions, which are:

1 From what contexts have contested conceptions of sustainable development emerged and how have they been constructed? What has been the role of power in that construction and how is this contested? And,

2 What conceptions of sustainable development are held by managers in major corporations and key informants in the broader social, political and economic context in New Zealand, and how are these conceptions constructed?

The supplementary questions arising from these 'grand tour' questions examine crucial aspects of the context in which the central research questions are embedded. Firstly, I examine how the concept of sustainable development evolved, how it has been constructed, and what the implications of sustainable development are for society and for business. This inquiry is undertaken through a review of the international literatures about sustainable development, drawing largely upon the social science discourse. Secondly, an examination is made of the discourse of sustainable development that has emerged from the literature on business and sustainable development. The aim is to examine how this 'green' business literature articulates conceptions of sustainable development; and the lack of a 'critical' perspective is identified as a major reason for its promotion of 'political sustainability' rather than sustainable development. The emerging critique of this literature is introduced, and my own research makes a contribution to that conversation. The 'critical' management literature that has evolved since the 1980s is briefly overviewed, but reveals that sustainable development so far plays an insignificant role in that emerging critique. This is followed by an examination of the discourse on sustainable development that has emerged from the corporate world; and associated with this is an inquiry into the purported hegemonic appropriation of the concept by powerful business interests.

These areas of inquiry construct the foundations for the empirical core of the thesis which examines how managers in leading New Zealand companies and key figures from the social context of business construct their conceptions of sustainable development; how managers' conceptions are shaped by corporate concepts of sustainable development; the extent to which societal structures shape both individual and organisational conceptions; and whether corporate influences shape broader policy-making. These investigations produced the three empirical themes of the narrative and the outcomes of the research investigation. A unified story is told that is based upon these themes. It holds a mirror to business and conceptions of sustainable development in New Zealand that enables me to tell a complex story

about ways in which sustainable development is being constructed. It reveals reliance at corporate and government level on a paradigm of 'management'; coalitions that play an important role in promoting a particular narrative of sustainable development, with the result of repressing other constructions; and the fact that the hegemonic appropriation is not complete, and that counter-hegemonic contestation is emerging. In the case of the participating companies, the evidence was gathered from corporate interviews and focus group meetings; and examination of company published materials, web-sites and newsletters also provided corroboration. The examination of the discourse within the broader context draws upon the analysis of publicly available documents and interviews with key informants involved in policy-making or acting as spokespersons for business and other organisations. Examination of these discourses reveals the key themes emerging in the narrative of business and sustainable development in New Zealand; and these are critiqued from the perspective of the international dialectic of sustainable development already provided.

The supplementary research questions fall into the following groupings:

a What is the history/genealogy/archaeology of the concept of sustainable development? How has the concept been constructed and what meanings have been attached to it? What is the role of power in the constructions examined? What vision could the concept provide for a new emancipatory theory of 'the good life'?

b What do the emerging 'green business' theory and the 'critical' theory of management contribute to the debate on business and sustainable development; and how is sustainable development constructed in the actions and literature emerging from the corporate world?

c What connections are to be found between these constructions and the concepts of sustainable development articulated by managers and key informants of the business context in New Zealand? What are the central stories that emerge from this inquiry?

The thesis is structured in four main sections. Section One comprises two chapters, this first one, providing a rationale for the research and outlining the motivations and paradigmatic and theoretical allegiances of the researcher, and introducing the area to be examined. Chapter Two expands upon the theoretical frame of reference selected. It examines the dialectics of nature within the canon of Marxist and Critical Theory as well as critiques of these theories; and considers problems the chosen theoretical basis may present to this study which also need to be taken into account. A case is made for an eclectic framework, drawing upon Critical Theory as well as some aspects of Foucauldian theory. The chapter introduces concepts from these theoretical conversations to be employed in the empirical research; and it is explained why alternative possible theories were not employed.

Section Two sets out in greater detail the theoretical foundation for the thesis and contains three chapters. Chapter Three focuses upon the dialectics of sustainable development; the evolution of the concept; how it is being constructed and the role of power in its construction; and ways in which it may be undergoing reconstruction. This unearths the key dichotomy that gives rise to the heuristic for the empirical research. Chapter Four undertakes an examination of how sustainable development is treated in business theory. Orthodox business theory, perpetuating the capitalist means of production and consumption, based in modernity and scientism, and utilitarian in its orientation, is seen as having played an important role in creating the environmental problematic. An examination is made of 'green' business theory and a case made for its potential contribution to 'political sustainability', and to the purported business appropriation of the environmental/sustainable development discourse. An overview is provided of the emerging critique of orthodox organisational theory, and the 'gap' it represents from a Critical Theory perspective. The chapter concludes with comments on the identified gap which provides part of the exploration for my empirical research; and the case is made for issues of sustainable development to be incorporated in a Critical Theory approach to the business discourse. The literature that signals this transition is introduced. Chapter Five first returns to the theoretical discourse of sustainable development explored in Chapter Three to tease out a 'contradiction' that helps to explain business' purported 'capture' or 'hijacking' of the sustainable development agenda. The act of appropriation, as exposed in the business literature and the growing critique of that

literature, is problematised through the lens of Critical Theory. The main themes in the emerging discourse on sustainable business are overviewed, and an heuristic based on 'weak' and 'strong' perspectives, and closely tied in with concepts from business (weak) and Critical Theory (strong) conceptions, provides the major tool of analysis for the empirical research.

Section Three provides an introduction to the empirical investigation and the chosen methodology and recounts the process of the research and the tensions that emerged in setting up the research project. Chapter Six overviews the methodology and methods employed in the research. It defends the choices made in terms of the qualitative methods and evidentiary strategies employed; the research design and the construction of samples and case studies; and the political and ethical considerations of the research and the practicalities of setting up the inquiry. The way in which my role as researcher was constructed is examined and defended, including the important issue for Critical Theory researchers of 'researcher honesty'. Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine provide the analysis and interpretation of the evidence arising from the empirical research. The three themes that emerged from the research process tell a unified story that holds a 'mirror' to business and conceptions of sustainable development in New Zealand, revealing a level of appropriation of the concept and emerging counter-hegemonic contestation.

The final section of the thesis comprises the Conclusions provided in Chapter Ten. It draws together the main strands of the thesis, discussing the efficacy of the research process and relating the empirical findings to the macro-questions posed at the beginning of the thesis. An important part of the chapter for myself as researcher is the auto-critique provided on the re-theorisation of the inquiry and how this worked for the research and myself as researcher. The chapter discusses the outcomes and conclusions from the inquiry and the implications for future research. I attempt to identify a way forward, based on the research outcomes, to a more sustainable model of production and consumption. This is based on the reality of the power relations exposed by the empirical research and the hegemony exercised over the concept of sustainable development, whether witting or not; as well as the evidence of counter-hegemonic views that already signal that the appropriation of sustainable development by business coalitions will not go uncontested.

1.7 Concluding Comments

The goal of providing an examination of how the concept of sustainable development is understood in major companies and the broader social context of business in New Zealand presented a number of challenges. The fact that perceived gatekeepers and hegemonic coalitions were forming to establish a 'sanitised' interpretation of sustainable development, fitted to the dominant growth paradigm, set in place political and ethical dilemmas that would have to be resolved situationally. In fact, as it emerged, and as is demonstrated in the empirical research, not all such dilemmas could be resolved, and some challenges remain for future work in this area. The proposition is advanced that a new meta-theory for natural and social emancipation might be based on a radical conception of sustainable development, although I understand the opposition to 'utopian' visions and the force of the dominant paradigm that opposes such emancipation in the face of its own pervasive grand narrative. The contested nature of sustainable development itself poses one of the barriers to be addressed. Its central dichotomy is that it can be understood as a 'product' of the capitalist model of production and consumption; *or* as an emancipatory construct that may oppose that model. My political allegiances lead me to support the latter construction while remaining acutely aware of how that concept is targeted for capture; while much of my life-experience teaches me that an emancipatory agenda of social and natural justice may be appropriated, deflected or opposed in many ways. My means of opening up the discourse in the empirical research relied strongly upon a dialectical and discursive approach to the 'problem' of sustainable development. It was based on the ontological principle that the things we take for granted are social constructs, contingencies that are subject to change; and that there can be creative and agreed ways to bring about change to constructs that have become 'naturalised' or 'reified'. Dialectical thinking and inclusive, democratic approaches make possible the exploration of the 'possible world' that a radical conception of sustainable development might envision. The employment of Critical Theory and Foucauldian theory to frame the research explorations ensured that the approach to the empirical investigation and the journey to be taken remained ontologically tough, critical and sceptical.

Chapter Two

Developing the Epistemological Framework

Then every thing includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself.
William Shakespeare: *Troilus and Cressida.*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the epistemological and theoretical frames of reference employed in the problematisation of the discourses of sustainable development and business and sustainable development. Before discussing the contribution Critical Theory has made to my research, I examine the dialectics of nature in Marxist theory and critiques of 'Marx and nature'. Marxist materialism and technological optimism as well as concepts of nature that are discernible in the development of Marx's theory of political economy are taken into account.[32] The dispute as to whether Marxism has anything to offer to an emancipatory theory of nature is addressed. Late twentieth century developments in Marxist thought that embrace the environmental problematic are introduced - new paradigms of 'eco-Marxism' (as opposed to industrial Marxism) and the 'orthodox' and 'humanist' framing of eco-Marxism,[33] which contributed to the theorisation of the research study. In the light of such re-conceptualisations of Marxist theory, I explore whether a meta-narrative of the 'good life' might be built upon the moral and ethical principles of 'sustainable development', conceived of as having the capacity to redirect capitalism towards environmental and social justice (Redclift, 1987; Jacobs, 1991). Concepts from

[32] See Marx 1964; 1970; 1976.

[33] Recent theories of eco-socialism suggest that Marxist theory can be 'redeveloped' to address current ecological as well as social problems. This discourse proposes that an alliance of Marxism and 'Green' theory might help us to envision a political theory of 'eco-socialism' capable of countering the capitalist ontology, or even of leading to 'sustainable capitalism' (Deléage, 1994; O'Connor, M., 1994; O'Connor, J., 1998; Burkett, 1999).

Marxian theory that became central to the research are identified, including domination, asymmetrical power relationships, repression, agency and emancipation.

The canon of the Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School and their followers is overviewed for the role Critical Theory has played in the discourse on nature and what it has to offer to the discourse of sustainable development. Concepts from Critical Theory employed in the research are identified, including theories from Horkheimer and Adorno, Marcuse and Habermas.[34] Having elected to construct a framework calling upon several theoretical bases, I also introduce concepts from Foucauldian theory that brought further insight into the way the industrial production épistème (IPE) and the control assumptions inherent within it have conceptualised production activities (O'Connor, 1994; Deléage, 1994); and how these are now constructing conceptions of sustainable development. Foucault's theories of 'history', 'genealogy' and 'architecture' and his perspectives on 'power' aided the examination of ways in which discourses are constructed, and can also be deconstructed to uncover the power/knowledge relationships in the workplace and the broader context. For Foucault, 'power' does not necessarily have a pejorative connotation (Faubion, 1994; Alvesson and Willmott, 1996): power 'over', for example, has different goals and outcomes from power 'to' - a concept that I attempted to explore in the research. These theories helped to explain the ways in which a discourse of sustainable development is promoted or constrained and how the narrative of 'the good life' may be developed or repressed.

One other comment needs to be made. The decision to construct my own theory for the research, drawing upon Critical Theory and Foucauldian Theory, was not made without a careful assessment of what some of the epistemological alternatives for the research offered. This, in itself, was a valuable exercise: it clarified the 'problems' associated with my chosen theories; but also underlined the strengths they provided that would outweigh these. As qualitative inquiry has established its authority and 'legitimacy', competing paradigms have informed qualitative research, 'critical'

[34] Although Habermas has been labelled a 'modernist' and has eschewed close involvement in the environmental debate, his theories of 'communicative action' and the 'ideal speech situation' (1972) are introduced as a way of framing some aspects of the empirical research into company conceptions of sustainable development. However, these parts of the research are not presented as a 'Habermasian' study.

theory and related ideological positions being only one of these. If the paradigm subscribed to reflects 'the basic belief system or worldview' of the researcher, her ontological and epistemological positions and her choice of method (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 105), then I can demonstrate that Critical Theory provided my preferred support for this inquiry. However, alternative paradigms held their attractions; and in some cases presented assumptions and implications that would also have complemented and supported the aims of my inquiry.

At a macro level, the decision to frame the inquiry in a qualitative approach was one way of ensuring that the 'context' so important to the relevance of this research became an important aspect of the investigation. In particular, the work carried out with corporate managers benefited from its exploration of the 'natural performance contexts' of participants (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1997). The qualitative approach made it possible to include the meanings and purposes that were attached to activities by the participants themselves; and to uncover the emic (or insider) views of participants as part of the 'discovery' dimension of the inquiry. Of the alternative paradigms available to me within a qualitative approach, the most attractive was 'constructivism'; and this is no doubt attributable to the level of complementarity between this paradigm and Critical Theory at the ontological and epistemological levels and in terms of a dialectical methodology. 'Positivism', as a possible paradigm, had little appeal for a research inquiry that, by the very nature of sustainable development, would be complex and value-determined. Constructivism offered a more dialectical approach to the discourse and contestation to be explored. However, the weakness, from my own perspective, was the ontological relativism that is central to the paradigm. My belief was that the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic (and gender) issues that are integral to a radical conception of sustainable development meant that my investigation would be better illuminated by the historical realism of Critical Theory; while part of the challenge was to remain aware of the 'problems' that accompanied this choice.

2.2 Marx and the Dialectics of Nature

> Marxist theory and method, divorced from orthodox dogma, still represents one of the most fertile intellectual traditions in which to locate ecological ideas, based as it is upon both the social construction of nature and the 'naturalisation' of human consciousness.
>
> Alfred Schmidt, 1971.[35]

The application of Marxist theory to the environmental debate has proved problematic, particularly for theorists located at the 'deeper green' end of the environmental continuum who have contested the status of Marxism (Eckersley, 1992). Social scientists and Marxists were late in turning their attention to the nexus between environment, capitalism and overarching issues of social justice (Redclift, 1987).[36] The early Marxian discourse on the environment was seen by ecocentrists as 'reactive' and 'defensive', signalling the Left's fear of a *return to conservatism* (Eckersley, 1992:76). For some time, Marxists, 'greens', eco-feminists and eco-centrists all repudiated the possibility of a Marxist-Green alliance (Tolman, 1981; Routley1981; Bramwell, 1989; Eckersley, 1992). More recently, Marxist theorists have constructed a response to the environmental crisis based on a renewal of fundamental Marxist theory to focus on such concepts as sustainable development and its emancipatory potential. What is envisioned is a form of 'eco-socialism' or a re-formation of capitalism – '*sustainable capitalism*' – based on a shift from industrial to ecological Marxism (O'Connor, M., 1994; O'Connor, J., 1998; Burkett, 1999).

2.2.1 'Nature' in Marxist Theory

Nature, for Marx, was principally seen as the 'medium' for human labour – the 'means and the material of ... (humankind's) self-realization in history' (Schmidt, 1971:17). The non-human world represented *'external nature'*, the *'laboratory'*, the

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[35] *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (Schmidt, 1971) was long regarded as the most influential study of Marx's view of nature, and had a major impact on a wide range of theorists, including Habermas.

[36] One catalyst for the critical re-examination of Marxist theory in relation to nature was the level of ecological devastation revealed in Eastern Europe after the collapse of Soviet hegemony. Until then, the Marxist critique of the upsurge of environmental concern in the 1960s and 1970s tended to see the movement as the élitist, self-interested preoccupation of the privileged and powerful middle class – an 'epiphenomenon of capitalism' (Enzensberger, 1974).

'tool-house' and *'larder'* to be appropriated by human labour. This dialectic of nature has fuelled considerable dispute as to whether Marx was 'ecologically' concerned in his vision of the good life. The ecocentric-anthropocentric divide, questions of 'values in nature' and conceptual differences about the 'nature of nature' have fuelled different contestations and raised questions for my research. The case made for the ecological sensitivity of Marx and Engels (Parsons, 1977) failed to present the ecocentric case against 'Marxian anthropocentrism', basing a 'Marxist theory of nature' within the power relationship of human mastery over nature (Eckersley, 1992:83). It failed to provide any 'emancipatory theory of nature', even though it provided a very thorough overview of Marx's perception of nature and its role.

Yet Marx recognised human dependence on nature and the priority of 'external nature' over 'materially transformed' nature (Schmidt, 1971:33). Nature which had given birth to humankind and supplied all its resources was 'first Nature': a dynamic force, but to be *mediated by human labour*, although humans formed part of nature in a holistic sense. This sense of nature as both an *element* of human labour and *the totality of everything that exists* was Marx's 'second Nature'. 'External Nature' or 'first Nature' assumed priority in a chronological sense; but, theoretically, 'second Nature' (transformed by humankind) was the more important, because 'the concept of a law of nature is unthinkable without man's (*sic*) endeavours to *master nature*' (Schmidt, 1971:70, emphasis added). In this sense, nature is a 'construct' of human making. The need to emancipate people from social want meant that Marx subscribed to the domination of nature, and a broadly instrumental, anthropomorphic and 'controlling' attitude towards the environment in keeping with the attitudes and values of the Enlightenment (Harvey, 1996:126). Marx did not represent humanity as 'divorced' from nature, but conceived of nature and the 'metabolism' of nature through the labour process as a dialectics that transformed both humans *and* the non-human world (Burkett, 1999).

Some of the debate about 'Marx and nature' has revolved around the differences between the treatment of nature in the writings of the young Marx (pre-1845) and those of the mature Marx as he became more preoccupied with economics. For the 'young Marx', nature was 'the inorganic body' of humankind which the labour

process 'humanized' into an 'organic' part of humanity. The transformation of the external world through labour was the means by which humankind realized its 'species being',[37] a transformative relationship that changed both humans and their needs *and* external nature in the process. It was the 'alienated' labour of the capitalist system that led to human estrangement from self, fellow humans and nature: a process we see today in the over-production and over-consumption of capitalism and its consequent impact upon nature and the life-world of people. 'Alienation' of nature separates humankind from its species being or 'human essence'. For Marx, the answer was not a revolution in humankind's relationship with nature, as ecocentrists and deep ecologists today would advocate, but revolutionisation of the capitalist institutions that created wage labour and private property, as today's Marxists still maintain. He foresaw the expropriation of the capitalist means of production by the proletariat as leading to a fully social mastery of nature (Eckersley, 1992:78). It was the antagonistic dialectics between *homo faber* and nature that the young Marx described: the 'good life' he foresaw was one where humankind would no longer be oppressed by a dominant class *or by external nature.* This antagonistic dialectics would be resolved through the *'humanisation'* of nature, not by a new dialectics where nature was valued for its intrinsic properties, as eco-centrists today insist.[38]

The developing eco-centric challenge to Marxism resulted in two major efforts to develop a Marxist 'solution' to the environmental crisis, distinguished as 'humanist'

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[37] 'Species being', for Marx, represented a situation of genuine freedom from need.

[38] A seminal three-way debate on Marx and nature (*Environmental Ethics*, 1980; 1981) highlights the critical tensions between a non-Marxist setting out an 'environmental case' for the young Marx (Lee, 1980); an orthodox Marxist (Tolman, 1981); and a radical eco-feminist (Routley, 1981). Lee sees the young Marx as representing nature as the source of 'value' as much as labour; but, as in the modern 'technological perspective', this value is 'abstracted' from nature which is 'purely an object for mankind'. The inherent contradictions of capitalism alienate both nature and human nature. Only by reconciling with nature will humankind actually acknowledge nature as its 'body' (p. 7). The capitalist mode of production and consumption is seen as the root cause of dehumanisation and ecological problems, which throws into question Northern organisation, production and consumption, and the creation of 'scarcity'. Lee concludes that it calls for social reorganisation based on a 'drastically different perception and method of analysis' (p. 11). Tolman (1981) also believes Marxist theory may help understand the environmental dilemma, but challenges Lee's reading of Marx: the key is to grasp the historical concrete relations of production (p. 74). Mastery of nature and humans are seen as essential components of human nature itself; and 'instrumental' value to humans underlies the valuing of nature, not nature's 'intrinsic' value. Routley (1981) dismisses the arguments of both, and the 'superficially attractive thesis of a Marxian unity between man and nature' (p. 237), since Marxist homocentric doctrine lauds the objectification of nature; while an environmentally sound non-capitalist society means moving beyond the central tenets of Marxism to a new theory.

and 'orthodox' approaches to 'eco-Marxism' (Eckersley, 1992). Humanist eco-Marxists set out to reassess aspects of Marxist theory – its technological optimism and the faith in a proletarian appropriation of the forces of production – and, like Lee (1981), they have found much of their inspiration in the writings of the younger Marx.

2.2.2 Marxist Eco-Socialism

The criticism and rejection of the Marxist theory of nature by factions of the environmental lobby brings into question the employment of aspects of Marxian theory in the epistemological framework of this thesis. It has been argued that to develop the submerged ecological dimension of Marx would mean negating key aspects of his philosophy of history, his theory of human nature, and his view of social transformation (Clark, 1989; and see Tolman, 1981; Routley, 1981; Eckersley, 1992). This calls for a defence of the choices I have made. One answer lies in the nature and locus of the research itself: my task was to conduct research into capitalist business conceptions of sustainable development as well as those held in the broader social context of the administrative state which is largely institutionalised to serve the needs of capital. A Marxist critique, focusing upon people working within capitalist modes of production and the context that supports capitalist hegemony, promised more salient insights into what *makes things the way they are* than commencing the task, for example, from an ecocentric perspective. In addition, the 'new' school of ecological Marxism that arose in the 1990s represented a fresh and contemporary approach to employing orthodox Marxist principles to an ecological situation which, as O'Connor (1998) points out, appears to be defying other modes of analysis. O'Connor highlights the irony of dismissing Marxism just as the world economy simulates the model Marx developed in *Capital*:

> '... environmental history is the study of how human agency shapes and modifies 'nature' and constructs built environmental and spatial configurations, and how natural and cultural environments both enable and constrain humankind's material activity; and conversely, how human activity both enables and constrains cultural development and 'nature's economy'. Seen in this light, the method of environmental historians tilts

> toward the only totalizing social science: Marxism.' (O'Connor, 1998:52).[39]

O'Connor suggests that the debâcle of communism in the former USSR caused 'the baby to be thrown out with the dirty bathwater of totalitarian socialism' (O'Connor, 1998:281), so that 'the greatest theory of capital' is rejected at the very point when capitalism is triumphing globally and when that theory would best help us to 'glimpse the future'. For O'Connor, the task of the environmental historian is to hold a mirror to the world and show it as it is and as it has produced and shaped its own nature, including its 'body' (O'Connor, op. cit., p. 52), a task which I have emulated in my research. The way the world has accomplished what is seen in the mirror is through labour – including technology and the divisions of social labour; power and the social divisions of labour – that is, through 'socially organised, symbolically mediated material production, distribution, exchange and consumption' (O'Connor, op. cit., p. 52). O'Connor argues that Marxian theory provides a valid way of examining the world and the dialectics of human agency, culture and nature: an examination which I maintain is central to understanding the potential of 'sustainable development'.[40]

Gimenez (2000) argues that ecology needs Marx if it is to become theoretically adequate and politically effective in seeking social and ecological change: ecology without Marx is an ecology for the privileged.[41] Her critique of environmental activism argues that the emphasis upon specific *issues* or *personal* change – which the environmental movement has driven - 'leave the *capitalist structural determinants* of ecological problems untouched and unchallenged' (Gimenez, op. cit., p. 196, emphasis added). Ecological discourse can 'mystify' and reify problems of the environment; and, in doing so, obscure the relations of domination of capitalism, blaming industrialisation rather than capitalism for environmental

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[39] It is emphasized, however, that 'totalising' theories are not what my research is advocating: I am not seeking 'that much-heralded theory that finally encompasses everything, that *finally totalizes and reassures'* (Foucault, *Preface to Anti-Oedipus*, in Faubion, 1994, emphasis added).

[40] The concept may initially represent what O'Connor refers to as an 'ideal event', that is, 'a speech act, a new twist of shared meaning, a fresh perspective on a form of intersubjectivity or the social construction of the individual'. A 'real event' is the material or socio-economic event that articulates with the 'ideal event' (1998:48-49).

[41] This echoes Enzsenberger, 1974: 'an epiphenomenon of capitalism'; and Redclift, 1987.

degradation (Gimenez, 2000:297). On the other hand, Marxist theory is built on theoretical categories and methodological guidelines that can help examine the determinants of the ecological problematic: a 'Marxist ecology' is possible because ecological principles are already central to Marxist theory, as Parsons (1977) and, more recently, Burkett (1999) have also argued. The answer this delivers to the eco-centrist critique of Marxism is that the examination of nature today cannot be undertaken as something *separate from human labour*: nature is a human construction, and we need to take into account 'the history of the planet and its people and other species' life and inorganic matter *insofar as these have been modified by, and have enabled and constrained, the material and mental productions of human beings*' (O'Connor, 1998:54, emphasis added). 'Environmental history' needs to be situated in the 'lineage of capitalist historiography of the past two or three centuries' (O.Connor, op. cit., p. 56), that is, within a Marxian dialectic of humankind and nature (O'Connor, 1998; Gimenez, 2000). This assists in examining the 'discourses' that have arisen from that dialectic: for example, the 'exploitation' discourse of industrialism, the 'pollution', 'population' and 'scarcity' discourses of environmentalism, and their specific modes of experiencing nature (Eder, 1996a). Added to these today are the discourses of 'sustainable development' which range from the functionalist 'management' paradigm supported by capitalist corporations to a political and progressive meta-theory of the good life.

The case against Marx and 'nature' largely revolves around the 'utilitarian' and 'instrumental' role that Marx delineated for nature, akin to the utilitarian functions that have been ascribed to nature by capital. Ironically, it can be argued that this differs little from some attitudes that the early Northern environmental movement of the twentieth century evinced, with its emphasis upon a Malthusian 'limits to growth', upon nature's utilitarian role, humankind's 'stewardship' and 'management' of nature,[42] and even the later attempts to 'value' nature – to put a price on aspects of externalised nature which some would see as having intrinsic value (Pearce, 1989; 1991; 1995; Pearce et al., 1990; Pearce and Moran, 1994; Costanza et al., 1997). This movement has tended to operate on conceptions of nature that are scientifically constructed. Where it differs from Marx is that its Malthusian emphasis on 'limits' to

[42] See the problematisation of this discourse in Chapter Three.

nature fails to address issues of the distribution of nature's 'goods' and represents an ideological position which justifies doing nothing about poverty.[43] It overlooks the fact that 'natural scarcity' was deployed as a political economic category (O'Connor, 1998:121). The case for an ecology of Marxism, on the other hand, is based upon the 'peculiarly dialectical' way (Harvey, 1996:126) in which Marx himself conceptualised the interaction between the social and natural worlds;[44] while his politics of self-realization called for the reinstatement of an 'unalienated' relationship with fellow humans and with nature. It is this fundamental aspect of Marxism that has predominated in the 'eco-socialism'/'eco-Marxism' discourse of the last two decades.

Eco-Marxists seek a theory of capitalism that enables us to think clearly about global environmental destruction and its *systemic* causes (O'Connor, 1998:127). They construct the 'sustainable development debate' primarily as an ideological and political discourse, while pointing out that it has been conducted as though it were only an ecological and economic question (O'Connor, 1998:234).[45] O'Connor (1994) also argues that the traditional Marxist focus on exploitation of labour now needs extension, with the force of the critique used to examine social mechanisms of destruction and exploitation of nature. We need to locate the discourse of 'exploitation' within the broader context upon which capitalist accumulation depends - biophysical nature, human nature and social infrastructures (O'Connor, 1994:7), which raises key issues for my research. The shift to be made from 'industrial' to 'ecological' Marxism requires a critique of how capital has degraded these three fundamental conditions of production (O'Connor, 1998:8). It exposes the ways in which capitalist domination of nature and people has exploited raw materials as 'free

[43] Neo-Marxists entering the environmental debate late in the twentieth century also dismissed the 'limits to growth' school, as well as some conceptions of sustainable development, precisely because their protagonists ignored the case for redistribution, for social and environmental equity (Redclift, 1987).

[44] Marx was aware of the specific environmental problems of his day (Redclift, 1997; O'Connor, 1998; Burkett, 1999). Both Marx and Engels noted the depletion and exhaustion of resources and the resultant waste and pollution. In fact, as O'Connor points out (1998: 638), Marx made a case for waste re-utilization that provides '*the glimmerings of a theory of social and ecological costs of the conditions of production.*'

[45] It is the nexus between 'economic' and 'environmental' imperatives that the 'business case' focuses on (see Chapters Five, Seven, Eight and Nine); whereas the 'social' and, in particular, the 'institutional' imperatives are largely ignored.

gifts of nature' – 'externalities'. This, in turn, exploits people even more pervasively than Marx had revealed, making them the victims of 'capitalism's debris': they suffer the effects of capitalism's degradation of nature whilst being robbed of their heritage. The potential is for Marxist theory to move the critique beyond the capital-labour relation and to open up the concept of a 'society-nature' totality (Deléage, 1994:47). This presents the over-exploitation and appropriation of nature by capital as *an extension of social hegemony*. It reveals that everything and everybody is absorbed into capitalist cost accounting and that the 'humanization' of nature into 'second nature' has commodified and valorized the environment as well as degrading it (O'Connor, 1998:163).

From an institutional perspective, the problems of capital and the problems of nature come down to making *democracy* work. O'Connor (1998) emphasizes the inextricability of social and environmental problems as these are fought out in contemporary struggles against the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the G8, seeing this as a contestation for democracy. Eco-Marxists perceive nature and humankind as dialectically interconnected: they grasp the anti-ecological nature of capitalism and the need for a theory that reveals the essential contradictions between exchange and use values. However, the Marxist material conception of history needs to be strengthened to include natural and cultural environmental factors to make up for the original absence of any theory of ecological sensibility (O'Connor, 1994; Eder, 1996b; O'Connor, 1998; Burkett, 1999). A 'new' Marxist theory would address 'nature's economy' as much as the human economy of labour and material production. In short, Marxism needs to become more 'ecological' and to attempt to answer, from an ecological as well as an economic perspective, the question: 'What should human society be?' (O'Connor, 1998:7).[46] The 'eco-Marxist' vision calls for radical socio-economic change (O'Connor, 1998:12), since the crisis is based in the foundering of democracy, reconstituted as a form of 'neo-liberal ideology and

[46] O'Connor points out that the new green radical movements of the late twentieth century have themselves arisen from the basic contradictions of capitalism, signaling that the movements could combine. At the same time, he notes (1998:60) that the environmental movements of the 1960s lacked self-reflexivity or any dialectical account of the development of *capitalist nature* and the rise of environmental and social movements: they did not question how and why capitalist second nature came about.

politics' (O'Connor, 1998). This renders political and social regulation too weak and 'simple' to deal with today's complex issues of production and reproduction. The hegemony of the capitalist market has resulted in 'symbolic politics'[47] which will not bring about a new vision of the good life (O'Connor, 1998). A coalition of ideals and understandings and a broader discourse, rather than the fractured discourse that currently characterises sustainable development, would mean developing a general, systematic theory of the reasons for ecological destruction – a 'political economy of ecology' – grounded in Marx's conception of the 'conditions of production' and providing 'the seeds of a theory of socialism and ecology' (1998:126). Burkett maintains that Marx is closer to modern day ecologists than many would realise: 'Overall, Marx's value analysis places him squarely in the camp of the growing number of ecological theorists questioning the ability of monetary and market-based calculations to adequately represent the natural conditions of human production and development' (Burkett, 1999:12). This presents a greater shift for 'ecological theory' than for Marxism (O'Connor, 1998); but it could be part of a broader transition, where the agency for social transformation was founded on a coalition of social movements and eco-Marxists focusing upon the social relationships of reproduction and the conditions of production (O'Connor, 1998:161).[48]

2.3 Critical Theory and the Marxist Heritage

The revival of interest in Marxism in the 1920s gave rise to the founding of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research (The Frankfurt School), resulting in the development of 'Critical Theory' as a major strand in the intellectual history of Marxism (Tar, 1977:18). Early members of the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse) sought to create a critical and emancipatory theoretical framework for the dialectical process to reveal that the suffering and social injustice of capitalist society were founded in the way the *social structure* was organised. Like Marx, they envisioned an emancipated and humane society based on 'the good life';

[47] It is argued that part of this 'symbolic politics' is the construction of 'political sustainability', adopted at government and business levels, that eschews any fundamental systemic or structural change.

[48] Other red-green movements have set out theories for the good life – see Commoner, (1972) and Bookchin (1982; 1990).

and the Frankfurt School came to represent a movement of enlightenment and opposition that denounced societal injustice. The dominance of 'exchange value' over 'use value' in capitalist political economy became a central target of their critique. Their concern was with the radical transformation of existing social arrangements to bring about their vision of a more humane society and the conditions for dignified human existence.

Some key elements of Marxist theory failed to become major components of Critical Theory, including historical and dialectical materialism and the critique of capitalism and class struggle. The Frankfurt School increasingly challenged the idea that 'true freedom' could come from 'perfection' of the dominant social arrangements, that is, supporting a process that was itself an instrument of domination and destruction (Eckersley, 1992:97). The Marxist theory of emancipation was broadened to include other areas of domination, including domination over nature. The Marxist critique of political economy was replaced with the critique of technological civilisation (Eckersley, 1992:101); while the conflict of 'domination' was perceived as being more fundamentally potent than even Marxism had allowed, both pre-dating capitalism and likely to survive its demise (Jay, 1973:156). This led to Marcuse's (1964) critique of how 'enslaving conditions' are perpetuated by the consumer society, where coercion of Marx's proletarian 'agents' is internalised. This critique is crucial to research on business and sustainable development, forecasting such concepts as the 'green *consumer*', who shoulders the responsibility for the environmental outcomes of capitalist production.

The term, 'Critical Theory', was itself adopted to contrast with traditional hypothetical-deductive theory, although it was acknowledged that some continuity was inevitable (Horkheimer, in Tar, 1997:29). It exposed the latent bourgeois 'Enlightenment' content of Marxism, though it also yearned for a 'new Enlightenment' which would denounce injustice and develop the resistance to it that would lead to its abolition (Landemann in Tar, 1997:viii). The CT critique of domination in bourgeois-capitalist society examined not only the domination of nature by humankind, but the domination of human by human, and the consequent

subjugation of human nature itself.[49] The 'Ideologikritik' of the Frankfurt School reveals, not what is 'immoral' or 'unjust' in the dominant ideology of society, but what is *'false'* – what represents a form of delusion that *legitimates* domination (Geuss, 1981).[50] The aim is to critique the epistemological views of the dominant ideology, opening them up to reveal how these have been constructed and what is their cognitive content. Positivism and scientism are critiqued, as is the narrow view that obtains of what is 'rational',[51] which ignores important areas of human consciousness and understanding. Enlightenment and emancipation from false beliefs is a major goal. Critical Theory can guide thinking today, when sustainable development is a new socio-political goal, to question which societal 'needs' and 'wants' are legitimate and which are ideologically 'false' in a world of grossly inequitable distribution.

2.3.1 Critical Theory and the Domination of Nature

The most important theoretical innovation of the Frankfurt School in terms of business and sustainable development is its critical examination of the relationship between humanity and nature. This represented the major assault on the ideology of the domination of nature (Harvey, 1996), directly challenging the orthodox Marxist belief that liberatory potential lay in humankind's mastery over nature through the productive forces. Critical Theorists believed this would lead to the domination of both 'outer' nature and the 'inner nature' of humankind: domination over nature, rather than humankind's reconciliation with nature, would be overtaken by 'the revenge/revolt of nature'.[52] On the other hand, a reconciliation of the 'negative dialectics' of Enlightenment and a resolution of the conflict between humans and

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[49] 'The history of man's (*sic*) effort to subjugate nature is also the history of man's subjugation by man' (Horkheimer: *Eclipse of Reason*, New York: OUP, 1947:105).

[50] This resonates with the goals of my research which sets out, not to castigate what is 'immoral' or unjust, but to uncover how domination continues to be legitimated under the 'guise' of sustainable development.

[51] One key theme that emerged in the empirical research was the emphasis, particularly from conservative business groups, upon the need for more 'rational' – i.e. positivist – 'definitions' of sustainable development.

[52] And see Alford, 1985.

nature would liberate both. This alternative critique sought to transcend the Marxist focus on the control and distribution of production and its perpetuation of the paradoxes of the Enlightenment tradition, such as the domination of nature, which, in some senses, made Marxism no different from liberal capitalism (Eckersley, 1992:101). It was considered self-vitiating to place faith in the creation of 'free' and 'autonomous' individuals through the medium of the 'domination of nature'. Although this 'utopian' vision ran contrary to history, the radical discontinuity between historical progress and the liberated society they envisioned being considerable, Critical Theorists maintained that the utopian impulse was vital to provide the 'critical distance' that would prevent total surrender to the status quo (Eckersley, 1992:103). This provides a basis for my own 'utopian' meta-narrative that sustainable development has the radical power to become the narrative for 'the good life': we need the 'critical distance' of an alternative, though not 'reified', narrative in order to critique the status quo.

The Enlightenment was seen by the Frankfurt School as having converted human nature and non-human nature into 'resources', repressing human joyfulness and spontaneity through the social division of labour and the repressive division of the human psyche (Eckersley, 1992:98). They rejected 'instrumental rationality' as the exemplar for a rational society and the good life.[53] [54] While 'reason' lay at the core of the search for the good life (Jay, 1973), the goal was to bring instrumental, subjective reason under the control of 'objective' or 'critical' reason, with the engagement in critical reflection that would reconcile the contradictions between reality and appearance. This opposed the commonsensical, functional approach of instrumental reason, with its concern for 'efficiency', 'adaptation' and 'means' not 'ends' that today characterises the dominant business paradigm and is central to my critique. The Frankfurt School sought to defend reason against both positivists and

[53] They saw what Habermas later called 'the scientisation of politics' as colonising the life-world of people and placing decision-making in the hands of technocratic élites (Bernstein, 1985:101).

[54] In *One Dimensional Man* (1964:130), Marcuse states: 'The principles of modern science were *a priori* structured in such a way that they could serve as conceptual instruments for a universe of self-propelling, productive control ... The scientific method [which] led to the ever-more-effective domination of nature thus came to provide the pure concepts as well as the instrumentalities for the ever-more-effective domination of man by man *through* the domination of nature' (original emphasis).

romanticists, with Critical Theory providing the means of fostering a mutual critique between instrumental, subjective reason and objective reason. The Enlightenment had overcome tradition, myth and superstition at a price: the ascendancy of instrumental reason over critical reason had distorted the very ideals of the Enlightenment. It had led to rationalisation and disenchantment, the resulting inflation of human sovereignty having paradoxically resulted in a *loss* of freedom. The anthropocentric views of the Enlightenment and the manipulation of nature had also led to the objectification and manipulation of humans. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1979), Adorno and Horkheimer provided their analysis of the consequences of the shifting struggle between 'man and nature' (Harvey, 1996:134), examining how the Enlightenment's objectives of emancipation and self-realisation (which they shared) had become frustrated – *'negated'* – by the very philosophical and political-economic shifts and practices designed to realise them. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* deals with the self-destruction of the Enlightenment, the metamorphosis of its once critical philosophy to affirm the status quo (Tar, 1973:81). The 'eclipse' of reason was the replacement of 'objective' reason with 'subjective', instrumental reason, where activity is 'reasonable' only if it has an operational value leading to the domination of humankind and nature (Tar, 1973:84). Today, this represents one of the main barriers to the changes in business operations that sustainable development calls for. Companies are reluctant to change to more sustainable methods of production unless they can see 'value' (rather than 'values') in doing so, even when they can recognise the environmental and social costs of what they are doing. They rely in their arguments upon 'reason' and being 'rational', and construct strong cases for their views, without reflecting on the ir-rationality of some business procedures.[55] As Eder (1996b) has argued, companies, like all of us, are locked into a particular kind of cultural habit and symbolic relationship with nature: although it could be argued that business has more to 'lose' than most as a result of any paradigm shift and will therefore fight change more fiercely.

However, Critical Theory, despite its early promise for the emancipation of humankind and nature, has not had a significant influence on shaping the theory of

[55] The issue of business' demands for 'rationality' as against the 'ir-rationality' of many of the processes of production emerged in the empirical research (See Chapter Seven); and is also examined in Chapter Five.

the 'green' movement. The dislocation between CT and the ecological movement has been attributed to a number of features of the philosophy of the Frankfurt School: its largely pessimistic outlook; its ambivalence towards nature romanticism; the rarefied language of its philosophers; its distance from everyday politics (*excepting for Marcuse*, Eckersley, 1992:99); its preoccupation with theory and its failure in terms of praxis, even though it had originally set out to unite these. Yet Critical Theory presents theoretical insights that foreshadowed the ecological critique of industrial society that developed in the 1960s and provided a potentially useful starting point for ecocentric theory through the linkages made between the domination of the human and non-human worlds; and I maintain that it has much to contribute to the dialectics of sustainable development.

2.3.2 'Excepting for Marcuse'

Marcuse is credited with providing 'some of the most sophisticated and powerful analyses of modern capitalism's environmental problems' (Luke, 2000:95), with his arguments for the interrelatedness of humanity and nature set against his vision of how technologies, economies and states 'co-evolve to dominate both human beings and natural environments' (Luke, op. cit., p. 95). Marcuse challenged liberal capitalist democracies during the Cold War with the suggestion that any 'contemporary industrial society tends to be *totalitarian*' (1964:3, emphasis added); and by demonstrating how the ecology and economy of multinational private enterprise provided another 'totalitarian order' that supported the hegemony. His sense of human needs also led him to counter the antifoundationist caution about 'meta-narratives'. He suggests that human understandings of natural and social environments are constructed by the cultural, political and technological means of organisation of the capitalist mode of production: there are *a priori* meta-narratives already in place. These covertly 'normalise' the domination of humanity, the government of the earth by technified economies of science, and 'the ever-more-effective domination of man by man *through* the domination of nature' (1964:158). Science 'generates' a nature that can be dominated (Latour, 1987), leading to the better control of humanity through the 'one-dimensional comfort' of consumption. Nature becomes part of the technical apparatus – sustaining and improving people's

lives while subordinating them to the 'masters of the apparatus' (Marcuse, 1964:168). This apparent 'improvement' in the conditions of many people's lives emerged as a counter-theme in the empirical research for my thesis.[56] Marcuse saw that people become accommodated to monolithic, one-dimensional narratives; whereas what is needed is multidimensional, dialectical discourse with a critical dimension that can free the discourse from its existing constraints. This also developed as an important theme of my research, particularly as it became evident that, in New Zealand, multiplicity of views on sustainable development is being repressed by the 'one-dimensional' business case for sustainable development.

Marcuse believed that the development of modern industry and corporate capitalism had increasingly accommodated humankind to the domination and administration of economic and social institutions over which people had little control. Technological reason poses perplexing problems for individual rationality. How can an economy and society create attractive forms of freedom when the 'unfreedom' of humanity and nature are preconditions of that economy's and that society's success? Marcuse posited that society should be judged by the levels of freedom from material want *and arbitrary control* that are realised, in keeping with Marx's utopian aspirations for humanity making the leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom (Luke, 2000:96). Powerful vested interests which manipulate the state, the apparatus of production and societal institutions, prevent such emancipatory prospects being realised by shaping psychosocial expectations, repressively 'normalising' these with routines that encourage the adoption of false needs - those 'needs' that are 'superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery and injustice' (Marcuse, 1964:4-5). The satisfaction of these constructed needs arrests the individual's ability to recognise the 'disease' or to grasp chances of its cure, resulting in 'euphoria in unhappiness' (1964:6); while the short-term surplus of wealth created by exploiting nature immobilizes 'real needs' - 'those needs which demand liberation, including liberation from that which is *tolerable* and *rewarding* and *comfortable* in the affluent society' (1964:7, emphasis added). This highlights that the paradigm shift to

[56] See Chapters Seven and Nine for this discussion. Several research participants pointed out that the conditions of life were much improved (at least for a section of the world's population) since the Industrial Revolution; and their faith in economic growth as the basis of sustainable development meant that wealth would continue to 'trickle down', in spite of historical evidence to the contrary.

sustainable development will be difficult in the affluent developed world, where the most profound acceptance of change is called for. Our material existence under these repressive conditions is indeed 'tolerable', 'rewarding' and 'comfortable', even though it relies on a system 'that creates deep, long-run, ecological disasters to sustain its shallow, short-run, institutional survival' (Luke, 2000:97). False needs become the cause of and excuse for continuing environmental destruction: an entire ecology is rooted in them, while they appear to offer 'freedom to choose' (Luke, op. cit., p. 97). 'Liberty' becomes the acceptance of mechanisms of domination which are *palatably* presented:

> ' ... the social controls exact the overwhelming need for the production and consumption of waste; the need for stupefying work where it is no longer a real necessity; the need for modes of relaxation which soothe and prolong the stupefaction; the need for maintaining such deceptive liberties as free competition at administered prices, a free press which censors itself, free choice between brands and gadgets.' (Marcuse, 1964:7).

Marcuse's critique was especially relevant for my research with companies that are centrally involved in producing the 'apparatus' of this false liberty. In terms of sustainable development, they may be seen as only tinkering with 'issues' such as pollution, energy-efficiency and waste. The participants in the empirical research could be perceived as 'captured' in several ways in the false economy that Marcuse critiques: they are integral to the technology that has become a tool for the social control of humanity and the domination of nature; and companies' aspirations for more environmentally benign ways of doing business may only be manifestations of the cynical conservation of nature to ensure continued economic production.

2.3.3 Habermasian Perspectives

To some extent, the turn away from Critical Theory by 'Green' theorists was influenced by Habermas' revision of the early Frankfurt School critique (Habermas, 1971; 1972; 1976; Dews, 1986).[57] Habermas rejects the contextualist position of the Frankfurt School, fearing the appeal to epistemic principles in stripping away false consciousness may itself be 'ideologically distorted', since the principles are *integral*

[57] And see Habermas, 1982; 1984; 1987.

to the traditional form of consciousness under challenge (Geuss, 1981; McCarthy, 1984). He starts from the position that all of the actors in the critique must *agree* in finding reflexively unacceptable any part of their form of consciousness, once this is revealed for examination. This calls for the 'ideal speech situation' (Habermas, 1972), where uncoerced and unlimited discussion takes place between completely free and equal human agents, the criteria being truth, freedom and rationality. He believes this can retrieve the possibility of rational consensus being reached by an 'informed citizenry' (Eckersley, 1992:107), although it is a process that has typically been subverted through the reduction of the discourse to technical discussion by 'experts'. Such a retrieval of the 'democratic process' is particularly important to the discourse of sustainable development in my research, where the danger is detected of the concept becoming depoliticized and appropriated by such technical and bureaucratic élites.

Habermas disputes the idea that domination of external nature inexorably leads to domination of human nature. Instead, he proposes that, while the logic of instrumental rationality governs our relations with the non-human world, as the earlier Frankfurt School would agree, it is the logic of *communicative rationality* that should govern interaction between people (1972; 1984). Like Marx, he sees the instrumental manipulation and control of nature as a necessity, and rejects the notion of 'reconciliation with nature'. In human communication, however, where the telos is autonomy, individuation and socialization, he holds that outcomes that are manipulative and controlling are 'pathological' (Whitebook, 1979, cited in Eckersley, 1992).

The problem that Habermas sees with 'instrumental rationality' is that it has failed to bring about the rationalisation of social norms in communication: participatory, democratic, undistorted communication leading to rational, universalistic, normative consensus – the norms of the 'ideal speech situation' - could never be achieved through the paradigm of instrumental rationality (Habermas, 1972; 1987). It might be argued, however, that, within the kind of equal, democratic discourse that Habermas envisions, the opportunity may exist for participants to address the human relationship with non-human nature, or to reach a consensual decision about the need for 'reconcilation' or 're-enchantment', or sustainable development. For example,

Dryzek (1987) has argued that Habermas' theory of a communicatively rationalized society would be more conducive to 'ecological rationality':

> 'the human life-support capacity of natural systems is *the* generalizable interest *par excellence*, standing as it does in logical antecedence to competing normative principles such as utility maximization or right protection.' (Dryzek, 1987:204).

However, Habermas' case is not defensible from an ecocentric perspective: his Enlightenment perspective that we can only know nature in instrumental terms has been widely criticised, particularly by those that perceive this very paradigm as the basis for the environmental crisis. His faith in the need for human technological control over nature is perceived as part of the 'techno-fix' paradigm which can, at best, like 'eco-efficiency', provide only 'damage-control', and may even cause additional environmental problems. The *intrinsic* value of the non-human world is something that Habermas does not acknowledge (Eckersley, 1992). The importance of his work to my research was the opportunity it provided to employ some of the characteristics of communicative action and the ideal speech situation – albeit in a general way – in the ongoing employment of the corporate interview which forms my chief evidentiary strategy.

2.3.4 The Contribution of Critical Theory to the Research

The employment of concepts from the broad perspective of Critical Theory in the research requires defence in view of the criticisms discussed. Perhaps, of the 'failures' of Critical Theory referred to, the most significant for this research are the alleged distance from day-to-day politics and a preoccupation with theory which severed the relationship with praxis. Marcuse reached a more optimistic faith in the development of revolutionary praxis from the counterculture and the student movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Eckersley, 1992:103) - although Marcuse also believed that the emancipation of the human senses under a form of humanistic socialism would make possible 'the human appropriation of nature' (1972). This led to fears among eco-centrists that the 'reconciliation with nature' would amount to no more than the total domestication or 'humanisation' of the non-human world (Eckersley, 1992:105). Others argue that Critical Theory cannot, in fact, qualify as

'Marxist', since it deviates so strongly from the basic tenets of Marxian social theory; and, again, because it fails to present a synthesis of theory and praxis (Tar, 1977:42) and came to resemble a 'sociology of despair' (Tar, op. cit., p. 76).

Nevertheless, the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt school helped me to develop a critical social theory that was comprehensive and robust enough to examine the complex discourse of sustainable development and its own potential contribution to a new theory of society. Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of domination contains key questions for environmental-ecological politics (Harvey, 1996). It calls into question *institutions* that have become taken-for-granted; for example, the lost role of scientific enquiry as a liberatory force - unless science itself is reformed to gain some humanity and purpose and to achieve 're-enchantment'. This is significant in view of the 'scientific' construction of nature that much of the modern ecological movement has been based upon and the scientific and technological optimism which has characterised some areas of the movement, particularly in relation to sustainable development. The Frankfurt School's challenge to the hegemony of instrumental rationality offers a more open, dialogical relationship between humans and external nature. It raises the question of what kind of aesthetic 'the good life' requires. Finally, the internal relation the Frankfurt School exposed between nature as 'other' and the domination of 'others' has remained a focal concern to this day, more recently examined in feminist politics, the environmental justice movement and the cluster of movements that has become known as 'the environmentalism of the poor' (Martinez-Alier, 1987). Harvey (1996) argues that these struggles were latent in the critical analysis of the Frankfurt School; and reminds us that, in terms of the environmental movement itself, such conflicts can take a 'curious turn'.[58] We might cite the instrumental reasoning of 'green' theorists who want to restructure *what* business does and *how*,[59] rather than examine the underlying structural reasons for *why* it does what it does and what business should *be*.

[58] Harvey cites a World Wildlife Fund proposal to create a nature reserve in a developing country which would involve the eviction of long-term based indigenous populations as a 'draconian' example of the (unconscious?) ideal of the domination of nature and of 'others' (1996:138).

[59] An example might be the focus on 'Zero Waste', and the utilitarian approach of 'wealth from waste' (Murray, 1999) which shifts the focus away from a theory of the social and ecological costs of the conditions of production.

A serious problem in terms of my research is the purported inability of Critical Theory to identify any meaningful agency of social change, which might have been helped, Harvey suggests, by opening up the dialectical analysis of internal relations into a more 'historical' and less 'logical' mode (1996:139). In addition, while the Frankfurt School critique draws attention to the potential for rebellion against the instrumentalities of the domination of nature – including today's vital issues of consumerism, the management of mass culture through the stupefying role of the media, and the increasing globalisation and colonisation of the life-world – it provides little *vision* as to how such rebellion might be channelled into productive and emancipatory directions. It might be argued, however, that Critical Theorists would not see it as 'emancipation' for them to provide such 'visions', when what they are theorising is the empowerment of people to develop their own visions.

In spite of these criticisms, Critical Theory does provide an insightful way of examining the contemporary business world. This view of its potential usefulness in business research is supported by the recent critique of diverse aspects of business operations conducted within a Critical Theory framework (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996; Alvesson and Willmott, 1996; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). This critique arises from the business discipline itself, and challenges the legitimacy of oppressive institutions and practices while promoting critical reflection on institutional practice with the aim of making people more 'autonomous' and 'responsible' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:13). Critical Theory has been employed to reveal possibilities of emancipation in the workplace and to discredit practices that legitimize institutional forms of oppression. It has been shown to encourage 'critical self-reflection' and commitment to changing the conditions that 'legitimise' practices of domination (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:15). This analysis of business practice based in Critical Theory and its relationship to my research is examined in Chapter Four.

However, Critical Theory has less commonly been used to explore the contradictions between corporate management and sustainable development. There are specific aspects of Critical Theory that provided concepts to test in my research. Horkheimer's theory of the *rational* individual versus the *irrational* society has relevance for the empirical research examining the perceptions of sustainable development held by individuals and those held in corporations and the broader

societal (and administrative) context. Critical Theory focuses attention upon the unsustainable internalisation of external coercion in today's consumer society. The Frankfurt School's distinction between enlightening and emancipating reason versus instrumental reason has implications for the critique of the technocratic thinking that is dominant in industry and administration and which may be a chief barrier to emancipatory thinking about sustainable development.

2.4 Foucault: Perspectives on Power

My eclectic approach to theory also employs Foucauldian perspectives[60] to assist in understanding how the discourse of sustainable development is being produced, how power is exercised over the concept, and the value to the research of a Foucauldian approach to discourse. This also helps to eliminate a 'totalising' perspective from the research, since Foucault held that 'left' values neither prohibit one from being anticommunist nor compel the desire for revolution (Gordon, in Faubion, 1994:xiv). The Foucauldian tools that underpin this dimension are 'history', 'archaeology', 'genealogy', and 'discourse'. In the relatively new discourse on sustainable development, Foucault can help to make clear the relations of power and knowledge, the constant *articulation* between them and the ways in which the exercise of power creates knowledge and bodies of information, while knowledge itself constantly induces effects of power (Foucault, 1975, cited in Faubion, 1994:xvi). This helped to unearth the ways in which powerful forces have developed different 'conceptions' of sustainable development and exposed the ways in which the concept itself contributes to the exercise of power.

Foucault did not write about the environment, and claimed to have no interest in nature – 'My back is turned to it' (Éribon, 1991:46). Consequently, I have essentially 'borrowed' perspectives to enrich the theorisation of my research story and make it more robust: no claim is made that this represents a 'Foucauldian' critique of the problematic of business and sustainable development. Foucauldian researchers on the environment (Darier et al., 1999a,) reveal the extent to which his theories help to

[60] Foucault acknowledged that the representatives of the Frankfurt School had said much earlier many of the things he was trying to say, acknowledging their merits 'with the bad conscience of one who should have read them long before.' (In Faubion, 1994:274).

examine, not the environmental problematic per se, but the *construction* of environmental awareness, 'environmentality', environmental ethics (Darier, 1999c), and the role of power in that construction. The importance of his theories for my work does not rest in the compatibility of his own work with ecological thought, but in this aid to understanding the *structures* that impinge on the environment and that underpin thinking about business and the environment.[61] Foucault helps to reveal that 'eco-politics' is a battle over key terms (such as 'nature', 'environment', 'sustainable development' and the discourse of business and sustainable development); and he provides tools for mining the development of and the power over these. His views on 'surveillance'[62] and the power of the 'Panopticon' in creating self-surveillance have implications for the environmentally literate individual's practice of environmental behaviours, as well as for practices of corporations and the increasing demands for corporate transparency, reporting and greater insight into what corporations actually do. In some senses, sustainable development has become part of the new 'social panopticism' that gives rise to new kinds of societal 'policing', which may include the means of production and consumption.

Foucault shows that power also comes from below – the global and hierarchical structures in a society operate through local and low-level 'capillaries' of power relationships, which raises questions about who holds 'power' over the concept of sustainable development in companies and broader society and how sustainable development is constructed. Foucault refused to treat power as a substantive entity, 'reified' as an institution or possession: instead, it is dependent upon *the set of relationships* within which it is exercised. This provided a perspective that was relevant to my research into who, in business organisations, may or may not have the power to bring about or repress a shift towards sustainable development; and the fact that this 'set of relationships' may not be immediately apparent. It also brought to the

[61] In a sense, it is similar to the case of Marxist theory: the value is not in the author's 'ecological' thinking (although a stronger case can be made for ecological Marxism, as has been demonstrated), but in the application of his theories to understanding the way things have come to be the way they are.

[62] The theme of surveillance emerged in the empirical work where 'social' aspects of sustainable development, if they appeared at all, tended to focus on 'looking after' employees. This often turned out to represent more tiers of employee surveillance and management, carried out through 'evaluations', 'performance reviews' and 'training'.

research the understanding that narratives are constitutive – they 'construct' reality, even though we may not be able to anticipate what will be constituted as 'reality'. Foucault perceives liberalism as government that *economizes* on the use of resources, that recognises that *to govern well is to govern less* (Gordon, in Faubion, 1994: xxviii). These concepts had importance for the discourse of sustainable development, in terms, not only of the role of the administrative state in contributing to the problematic, but also in terms of what *kind* of government and what *exercise* of power is most appropriate to address it. For Foucault, the problematic of government is the way to address the relation between power and freedom, with the insight that *power, understood as action on the actions of others, only works where there is some freedom* (Gordon, op. cit., p. xxviii). This also has implications for the discourse in New Zealand where the control over the discourse of sustainable development has so far been tight and largely enacted as 'action on the action of others' rather than emancipatory discourse.[63]

Foucault's conception of *history* provides a way of diagnosing the present as part of a process which is not allowed to stop or settle - to 'reify'. It examines the present in such a way that it disturbs the 'taken-for-granted', echoing Gramsci's theory of hegemony (1971) that operates through 'false consciousness' and needs to be disturbed/exposed. This potentially makes an important contribution to research on sustainable development, where the concepts explored are in process, and where the diversity and complexity of issues of sustainable development and the importance of futurity mean the concepts should not be permitted to naturalise or reify, while any attempts at appropriation should be deconstructed. It means being alert to the many *contingencies* that resulted in the construct of sustainable development and its contested interpretations, as well as the contingencies that now foster corporate interest in the concept. Foucault was interested in the role of knowledge as *useful and necessary* to the exercise of power, and its being *practically serviceable*, rather than false (Gordon, in Faubion, 1994). This provided the valuable perspective for my empirical research of not judging another's 'truth' to be 'false' while considering what its practical usefulness is to the exercise of power. In other words, as Gordon

[63] International fora on environment/sustainable development have presented a discourse about the '*conduct of others' conduct*' – with the North having clear views about what was needed for the South to achieve a better quality of life; and the South having an equally clear conception of the changes to Northern life-styles that were paramount.

points out (op. cit., p. xvii), Foucault extends our capacity for 'suspicion', 'vigilance' and 'doubt' - valuable qualities in examining the discourse on sustainable development which has itself been the subject of ideological attempts at appropriation. Foucault argues for *history without judgements*, (Kendall and Wickham, 1999:30); and while it is difficult to erase *judgement* from the choices made in the research, it is also manifest that the sustainable development literature is full of judgements, and that understanding of the construct might benefit from less judgement and more 'Pyrrhonian scepticism' whereby Foucault reminds us that '*we cannot know anything, including the fact that we cannot know anything*' (Kendall and Wickham, 1999:10). Some of the 'problem' of sustainable development has been the influence of 'experts' who claim to be all-knowing in such a complex area and their attempts, inadvertent or not, to 'mystify' it. Importantly for the research conducted with companies, Foucault's position requires a 'sceptical acceptance' of *how things are* – an honest assessment of the issues of sustainable development without the subjectivity and judgement that place un-Foucauldian 'limits' on the historicization of the concept.

'Archaeology' is an 'ordering tool' that 'describes discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive' (Foucault, 1972:131); that is, in the 'general system of the formation and transformation of statements' (1972:130). It helps to explore the networks of what is said and what can be seen in a set of social arrangements.[64] The 'scepticism' this calls for assisted my examination of some of the 'taken-for-granted' assumptions of the North toward the environmental problematic and the de-construction of the roles of capitalist structures and institutions. It aided my investigation of the emergence of sustainable development as a concept and a set of principles for living. 'Genealogy' is used by Foucault in a sense that is akin to the Critical Theorists' use of 'critique', embodying some of the ingredients of 'archaeology', but with a focus on the analysis of power. It is an emancipatory tool used in the quest of freedom: 'a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, and so on, without having to make

[64] In the discourse on sustainable development, we might say that the Northern focus upon environmental degradation has produced statements about degradation (and, often, the role of the poor of the South as responsible for this) which have made the 'problem' of environmental degradation more visible, without unearthing its origins in capitalist structures and institutions.

reference to a subject that is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness through the course of history' (Foucault, 1980, cited in Faubion, 1994:118). It concerns itself with the 'disreputable origins' and 'unpalatable functions' of institutions (Darier, 1999a). It is a methodological device to unearth truth about the origins and functions of things that we might prefer to keep hidden – in the context of this research, such things as the real causes of Third World poverty and the role of Northern capitalism in creating this.[65] Foucault forces us to question assumptions about power, ideology and repression.

In terms of the 'educational' interest that underlies my research (and any normative implications that this might bear), as well as the nature of the empirical research conducted with groups and individuals, Foucault's focus later in his life on the conditions for the emergence of 'self-construction' is important. He became interested in how individuals shape or construct their own self, their own subjectivity and identity, and how this in turn shapes their conduct in the world in a way that may make them relatively autonomous of the process of normalization: 'one must take responsibility for inventing or producing oneself' (Foucault, 1984:39-42). It means we come to see beyond the contingencies that have made us what we are in order to think and be in ways that are new to us. This offered an interesting perspective to the methodology for the empirical research: in terms of working with people who were exploring their own conceptions of sustainable development and thinking about 'the good life' of ecological and social sustainability which may prove to be different from their current notions of the good life, Foucault's theory of how *we can construct ourselves* as sceptical, non-judgemental but perceiving people, was of interest. If the discourse of sustainable development ultimately rests upon individuals and their relationships to nature and other people, then this awareness of the freedom to *remake self-identity* is important.

Another theoretical contribution was the concept that discourses are 'productive' – in a Foucauldian sense, we could not conceive of sustainable development before we

[65] A Marxist might argue that the creation of *overpopulation* as a problem causing environmental destruction needs the *embarrassment* of its 'disreputable origins' in capitalist operations being exposed. A sceptic might interpret the new business ideology of 'eco-efficiency' as disguising the disreputable origins of the environmental problematic in the capitalist political economy and its growth paradigm.

invented it through discourse. We can therefore examine what the discourse of sustainable development is being 'used' to produce through appropriation, and what it might produce through more dialectical discourse. Might Foucault's theory of self-construction, for example, produce the 'environmentally literate' person who is more perceptive of and critical of the construction of sustainable development in the workplace? Furthermore, discourse cannot be understood without taking into account the mechanisms of political calculation – in the case of sustainable development, international principles and conventions, legislation, as well as other mechanisms that are not overt but which can be revealed through genealogical analysis. In a discursive sense, many of the 'problems' and 'issues' of sustainable development have been invented through discourse. We have to ask if the discourse has constituted *underdevelopment*, *poverty*, *the global problematic*, even *sustainable development* itself – without claiming, of course, that bio-chemical and physical processes or the social relations of capital were not, in fact, materially taking place. Discourse has the capacity to 'invent' and then reify things, and perhaps, thereby, create its own problematic.[66]

2.5 Concluding Comments

My research goal of telling a theoretically grounded story based on conceptions of sustainable development relied strongly on the epistemological framework constructed from Critical Theory and Foucauldian theory. The decision to move away from both 'management' and 'green business' theory called for the re-theorisation of my inquiry in a critical perspective, but one that was broad, and that would assist me in shifting from a functional focus on 'how' corporates moved to sustainable development to a conceptual understanding of what drove or inhibited that shift. It called for explorations into questions of power and knowledge in how constructions are arrived at; of asymmetrical control over the power of definition; and of who exercises that control. Although the chosen theorisation was not without its complications, I believe that it has assisted me by providing the tools, not to

[66] We also need to take into account the many discourses of sustainability that do not arise from a Northern philosophical perspective, such as those created and understood by native people (Shiva, 1993; 2000).

produce a theory of sustainable development per se, but to examine the taken-for-granted structures and beliefs that have resulted in *un*sustainable development. The theorisation of the research drove the problematisation of the concept of sustainable development and the contestation of the concept emerging from business; and provided the tools to critique the management paradigm and the 'management' of sustainable development. The auto-critique of my re-theorisation is provided in Chapter Ten.

Chapter Three

Problematising the Discourse of Sustainable Development

> When an environmental issue is probed to its origins, it reveals an inescapable truth – that the root cause of the crisis is not found in how men (*sic*) interact with nature, but in how they interact with each other; that to solve the environmental crisis we must solve the problem of poverty, racial injustice and war; that the debt to nature, which is the measure of the environmental crisis, cannot be paid person by person, in recycled bottles or ecologically sound habits, but in the ancient coin of social justice.
>
> Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle*, 1972.

3.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, the epistemological framework outlined in Chapter Two is drawn upon to examine the evolving discourse of sustainable development. Critical Theory is employed to unearth the role of power and domination in the origins of ecological and social unsustainability and in the struggle for construction of the concept of sustainable development. The theories of Horkheimer and Adorno (1947) highlight the danger of the dialectic being subsumed in narratives of 'technological expertise' and 'management' that have colonised the sustainable development discourse. Habermas (1971) highlights the tendency for 'expert' élites to dominate any discourse, and provides the vision of greater shared agency over the concept through improved communicative action. Marcuse (1964) keeps in focus the one-dimensionality of a world of unsustainability governed by the effects of over-consumption and its consequent disempowerment of nature and humanity. Foucauldian Theory provides the tools of genealogy and archaeology to unearth the origins of taken-for-granted structures that impact on the discourse and provides a way of excavating the invisible foundations that underpin attitudes, beliefs and institutional structures. The genealogy of the discourse of sustainable development reveals the ways in which it has been constructed and framed (Evernden, 1992), and the contested and conflicting perspectives that characterise its dialectics. This problematisation provides the context for the examination in Chapter Four of the discourse on sustainable development in orthodox and emerging business theory and how models of power promote or inhibit the discourse; and, in Chapter Five, of the

charge that the concept has already been appropriated through the power of capitalist business and its concern to control, and thereby neutralise, the discourse.

A brief analysis of the fundamental causes of the environmental and social problematic reveals the origins of the construct of sustainable development and its central questions of values, justice, equity and a responsible relationship with nature. It uncovers the impacts of Northern capitalism's global domination of the economy, the political arena and the life-world of people. The origins of the problematic can be traced back to the changing values and technology ushered in by the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, and to the ideology of the Enlightenment, the goals of which came to underpin capitalist conditions of production. At the same time, the genesis of the construct is contested: it is seen by some as arising from the capitalist means of production and consumption that is at the base of unsustainability, and supporting the hegemony of that paradigm (Sunderlin, 1995). The Chapter takes account of the role that Northern thinking and practice have played in both creating the problematic, and in assuming domination over the ensuing 'environmental' discourse and the dialectics of sustainable development. It is revealed that such domination and framing of the sustainable development discourse, and the resultant lack of discursiveness and inclusivity, have prompted critiques arguing that sustainable development has 'reached a conceptual dead-end' (Sneddon, 2000) and should be shelved in the interests of a more productive discourse of 'sustainability'.

The research questions to be addressed in this part of the dissertation are:

> 'From what contexts have contested conceptions of sustainable development emerged and how have they been constructed? What has been the role of power in that construction, and how is this contested?'

The examination of how power and knowledge have defined and constrained the discourse prepares the ground for the examination of the appropriation of the concept by corporate power (Chapter Five); and the ways in which the contestation and struggle for power are played out in business and the broader context in New Zealand (Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine).

3.2 The Global Problèmatique

When the Club of Rome[67] coined the term, 'The Global Problèmatique', for the environmental crisis of the early 1970s it was intended to capture the connections and dynamic interactions between the various aspects of the problem – those linkages and knock-on effects that now reverberate throughout the world (Reid, 1995). The institutional roots of the crisis, with its social, political and economic dimensions and the associated cultural, spiritual and intellectual implications, can be traced to the emergence of the capitalist economy from the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions in England (Merchant, 1980; Capra, 1983; Carley and Christie, 1992; Capra and Spretnak, 1995). Central to the changing worldview was the shift in attitudes towards nature wrought by the ideology of the Enlightenment, leading to nature's 'disenchantment' and the dissipating of its power over physical and spiritual aspects of human life (Eckersley, 1992; Merchant, 1980).[68] The new scientific paradigm at the core of the Enlightenment that transformed the human-nature relationship, combined with the capitalist model of production and consumption, produced a *degree* of change and *scale* of degradation not previously possible (Merchant, 1980). Along with this, the Northern process of domination, effected through colonisation in pursuit of resources, markets and land - and later extended through the globalisation of trade, technological expertise, the money market and communications (The Ecologist, 1993) - eventually resulted in global impacts on nature and the lives of people. Today, 'any clear dichotomy between pristine ecosystems and human-altered areas that may have existed in the past has vanished' (Vitousek, et al., 1994:1861). The Earth is now beyond the point where boundaries can be ascribed to environmental problems and the associated social impacts. However, the sharing of the impacts is not equitable, as the eco-justice movement underlines: the poor disproportionately shoulder the consequences of environmental

[67] The Club of Rome comprised industrialists, educators, scientists and others who saw that the interdependence of the world's economic, social, financial and cultural systems had resulted in the earth becoming 'a stressed system', and feared the exhaustion of many key resources. The Club of Rome has since been criticized for its technocratic assumption that nature can be 'managed'. (See Escobar, 1996; O'Connor, 1998).

[68] The cast was set for modernism and unsustainable development through the destruction of the organic worldview of nature and of her role as 'nurturing mother', effected through the new science of Newton, Hobbes, Déscartes, Bacon and Locke. The shift was made from the world perceived as 'organic, living, spiritual universe' to 'the world as machine' (Merchant, 1980).

degradation (Faber and O'Connor, 1989; Faber, 1997; Sadd, 1997). These social and environmental impacts and the struggle to deal with them led to the coining of the concept of 'sustainable development' and its appearance on the international agenda in the 1970s (Carley and Christie, 1992).

There were early precedents for today's eco-injustice: Foucault's 'embarrassing questions' reveal the 'disreputable origins' of the emergence of the model of the 'freer', more liberal market in England. By the mid-nineteenth century, a far-reaching experiment in social engineering typified England, powerfully driven through state intervention. This had started with the appropriation of common land, which was presented as an ostensibly public and democratic process controlled by Parliament, while actually driven by big property owners (Gray, 1998:8). The transformation of England to an industrial society through the force of capitalist industrialisation provided a microcosm of today's global money economy and prevailing paradigm of profit and domination.[69] It signalled how future trade that developed between colonisers and colonised would become skewed (Carley and Christie, 1992), and how the lives of people in the South would be transformed by powerful and seemingly indomitable Northern[70] interests. The new scientific and industrial revolution of the twentieth century meant that Northern power would go on to impact on developing nations under the guise of 'development' and of 'aid'.[71] Adam Smith's concept of 'the invisible hand'[72] was reconstructed to endorse whatever operations the capitalist free market economy called for. The plans of the

[69] The changes in England did not take place without contemporary comment and action (see for example, Engels, 1884, *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*); and social and political upsurge characterised the reaction of people denied their traditional ways of life then, just as globalisation gives rise to a force of protest today. In a country rapidly increasing its colonial empire, 'Luddites', as well as 'surplus' population that it was sometimes difficult to feed, could be disposed of through a combination of transportation and settlement to colonies (Thompson, 1963). Part of the 'experiment' was the colonization of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

[70] The term, 'the North', will be employed throughout this thesis to signify the 'developed' countries, and 'the South' for the 'developing' countries, bearing in mind that these terms also emanate from 'the North'.

[71] Northern domination over the developing world has resulted in the poor subsidising the rich through both debt repayment and parting with resources (Ekins, 1992:20). For example, sub-Saharan Africa paid twice the sum of its total debt in the form of interest between 1980 and 1996, yet still owed three times more in 1996 than it did in 1980 (Monbiot, 2003).

[72] Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776, advocated local accountability, moral reasoning and a limit to the bigness of business, but his theories are now used to vindicate the actions of modern capitalism (Korten, 1995).

Allies crafted at Bretton Woods after World War Two resulted in extended ways of exercising power over people and nature through the globalisation of the economy, strengthened by the creation of Northern-dominated global structures such as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO (Lang and Hines, 1993; Esty, 1994; Brack, 1997).[73] [74] These institutions, set up to run the world in a 'democratic' fashion, have proved deeply undemocratic (Monbiot, 2003). They imposed liberal market structures onto the economic life of societies worldwide, creating what amounts in many ways to a single global, asymmetric 'free' market (Gray, 1998:2), which, to the poor and the powerless, has represented an 'invisible elbow' (Jacobs, 1991:127).

The neo-Marxian contribution to the environmental debate that emerged in the late twentieth century helped to expose the effects of this domination, and tipped the discourse from a Northern-dominated focus on 'nature conservation', based in a scientific paradigm, to one which examined the inextricability of environmental and social responsibility and exposed how power and knowledge are used to dominate the environment and people.[75] The root causes of the global problematic were exposed as the capitalist means of production and consumption, the institutions set in place to support this, and the asymmetric power that those institutions represent.

The global problematic today mirrors the intensified outcomes of the capitalist political economy and its colonisation of much of the globe. Massive increase in world trade continues to benefit the North,[76] while the broad secular trends of

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[73] Decisions made by the Allies at Bretton Woods in 1944 defined important aspects of the debate about political and environmental justice (Rich, 1994) by setting in place the structures for increased control by the North - the 'bailiffs' of the world economy, putting the burden of maintaining the balance of international trade on the poorest debtor nations (Monbiot, 2003).

[74] The WTO enforces free trade on weaker nations according to rules with which the richer nations do not comply. 'Structural adjustment' entails removing barriers to trade and capital flows, liberalising banking systems, reducing government spending on everything except debt repayments, and privatizing assets to foreign investors (Redclift, 1987; Lang and Hines, 1993; Rich, 1994; Monbiot, 2003). In the meantime, rich nations maintain their own protection through tariffs, import restraints and subsidies that keep out imports from poorer nations.

[75] See, for example, Commoner, 1972; Bahro, 1984; Adams, 1990; Jacobs, 1991; Smith and Warr, 1991; Carley and Christie, 1992; O'Connor, 1994; Harvey, 1996; Redclift, 1987; O'Connor, 1998.

[76] The UN's annual Human Development Report (2003) charted increasing poverty in the 1990s for more than a quarter of the world's countries owing to the combination of famine, HIV/Aids, conflict and failed economic policies (*The Guardian*, 9 July, 2003, pp. 1-2).

Northern capitalism have taken root in newly industrialising countries (NICs). Inequalities between rich and poor countries have forced the poor to adopt 'market-friendly' policies and to embrace a liberal market version of capitalism (Carley and Christie, 1992). Developing countries have become trapped into Northern consumerist aspirations, with Southern élites enjoying new-found life-styles while basic levels of health, welfare and education for the majority fail to be attained (George, 1976; 1988). The assault of the Northern media on the South ensures the continuing hegemony of Northern values. This is an extension of the earlier capture of the commons and the drive for imperialism (Newby, 1980; The Ecologist, 1993). However, today's imperialist powers are likely to be transnational corporations, often richer and more powerful than individual governments (Korten, 1995); and elusive, able to shift wealth and plant around the globe. The crisis is consequently enormously complex and has itself formed a site for political contestation. It demands serious reduction of the environmental impacts of industry,[77] which in turn calls for fundamental changes in economic structures and processes which conventional economic analysis ignores, and which this research reveals is denied and resisted at industry and institutional levels.

The essential character of production and consumption patterns is at the basis of most serious environmental problems (Jacobs: The Real World Coalition, 1996), as is the issue of values. Redclift (1996) points out that we have confused the 'standard of living' with the quality of life, making the consumer society that underpins the capitalist goals of business easier to manipulate (see also Marcuse, 1964; Robertson, 1990; Durning, 1992), and destroying Marx's vision of the proletariat as agents of change. This legitimates corporate control over expectations and behaviour, where individual acquisition of the status symbols of the capitalist version of 'the good life' outpaces concern for 'the common good' (Daly and Cobb, 1989). A corollary of this has been the emergence of social movements which, despite their epistemological and political differences, are linked by their concern for environmental, social and equity issues (Chapter Two). These may represent a potential force for change which

[77] While the world's population tripled during the twentieth century, and industrial production has increased fifty times, with 80% of that increase taking place since the 1950s (McNeill, 1989, cited in Reid, 1995:248), intensified agricultural production has kept pace with population growth, but has also brought desertification, soil erosion and salination.

could provide a powerful alternative paradigm to that of the capitalist political economy (O'Connor, 1998).

3.3 The Environmental Backlash

The counter-attack against the power of the capitalist means of production and its impacts on the environment (if not against other institutional forms of hegemony) started with Rachel Carson's[78] exposé of the chemicals industry (1962), and is well-documented, needing only a brief summary of key points here. The new environmental discourse of the 1960s and 1970s was grounded in a perspective that was broader and more 'political' than the earlier 'conservation' discourse.[79] It exposed the outcomes of capitalist industry and economics and threw doubt on the dominant political conception that economic growth itself, left unfettered, would resolve environmental as well as social problems. The energy of that early movement, with its emphasis upon environmental and public virtues, may be reflected today in new social trends, such as the protests against genetically engineered food and globalisation; whereas the 'environmental' movement itself has to a large extent become engulfed in the predominating *environmental management* paradigm and has relinquished some of the moral leadership it once represented (Sachs, 1993). *A Blueprint for Survival* (The Ecologist, 1972) forecast the irreversible destruction of life-support systems and the breakdown of society. The establishment of the Club of Rome and the publication of 'Limits to Growth' (1972) re-launched a neo-Malthusian[80] discourse, expounding the problèmatique as arising essentially from exponential population growth and reinforcing Hardin's argument (1968) that people are incapable of putting 'collective' interests before 'individual' ones. As neo-Marxists joined the debate (for example, Redclift, 1987), the 'Limits to

[78] 'Silent Spring' (1962) not only revealed the impacts of the chemicals industry on nature and human life; its potency was in being one of the first texts to popularize and 'politicise' scientific knowledge, departing from the 'rules' of knowledge production in the domain of natural science (Livesey and Kearins, 2002). The way in which industry responded to Carson's exposé was one of the first instances of industry lash-back on the environmental critique (see Graham, 1980).

[79] See, for example, Marcuse, 1964; The Ecologist, 1972; Commoner, 1972; Ward, 1979; Ward and Dubos, 1972; Meadows, et al., 1972; Schumacher, 1973, Erlich, 1974; and Boulding, 1976, amongst others.

[80] So called after Thomas Malthus, whose *Essay on the Principles of Population* (1798) propounded the theory that the earth would run out of resources as population and consumption increased.

Growth' focus on 'scarcity' was exposed as ignoring the discourse of 'distribution'.[81] The contestation had already become a struggle as to who should define and construct the discourse, based on the nexus between power and knowledge. Detractors of the environmental backlash scoffed at both the 'doomsday scenarios' and the 'utopian' alternative that *A Blueprint for Survival* presented. Cornucopians[82] like Beresford (1971) and Maddox (1972) placed their faith in technical expertise - plentiful resources and energy, the ability of the 'green revolution' to feed starving populations, and technical solutions to problems of resource production. Business – caught on the back foot initially in the face of this backlash - soon gathered its considerable weight to undermine the environmental cause with various means of coercion, mostly based upon extending its control over public attitudes through a pervasive hegemony that colonised the life-world of the public through the media (Beder, 1997; Rowell, 1996; Welford, 1997; Mayhew, 1997).

A different kind of attack and a different hegemonic contestation arose from socially concerned groups who perceived the 'ecological crisis' as employed to legitimate inattention to the problems of social injustice, of war and the impacts of capitalism, further disempowering the poor and weak. Clarke (1975:62) points out that the ecological crisis was not a diversion from social ills, but a *result* of them. However, the perception of a dichotomy emerging between 'environmental' and 'social' concerns, and the suspicion that social justice was taking a back seat in favour of the Northern focus on environmental issues, became a growing concern, especially in developing countries. It impacted on the international environmental discourse, particularly in the lead-up to the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE, 1972), and found its legitimation in the WCED Report, '*Our Common Future*', in 1987.[83]

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[81] The 'constructed' nature of 'scarcity' had been critiqued earlier by Bookchin (1971) and Marcuse (1972). See also Achterhuis (1993).

[82] This 'scepticism' is kept alive today through the alternative discourses on the environment of writers such as Beckerman (1994; 1996, 1999) and Lomborg (2001).

[83] The WCED Commission was the third set up by the UN in the 1980s, the others being the Independent Commission on International Development Issues (ICIDI), which produced the Brandt Reports, *North-South: A Programme for Survival* (1980) and *Common Crisis* (1983); and the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues (ICDSI), which produced the Palme Report, *Common Security: A Blueprint for Survival* (1983).

Another potential form of hegemonic appropriation requires comment: the epistemological and ontological basis of the analysis of the global problematic has come chiefly from the North. Accounts of the growth of environmentalism, such as the one provided here, have themselves mostly arisen from the industrialised world (Adams, 1990); and Redclift (1984) warns against international comparisons based entirely on European or North American experience. These cautions from the North echo those of writers from the South who claim that Northern environmentalism is an extension of the pervasive Northern hegemony and its 'global' reach (Biswas, 1984; Shiva, 1991; 1993; Gudynas, 1993; Beney, 1993). The 'framing' of the concept reflects Northern constructions, and a particularly invasive form of Northern appropriation and domination that sometimes attempts to disguise the origins of the problematic while taking the higher moral ground; or ascribing the causes to other sources, such as the behaviour of the poor of the South. This demands a more inclusive problematisation of the concept that takes into account other worldviews and cultures than those of the North alone and that takes a much broader-based, discursive approach. It has particular significance for the discourse in New Zealand where the cultural views of the indigenous people are allowed to play only a token role in many discourses, despite the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) being increasingly built into legislation.

3.4 The International Contestation for Sustainable Development

The environmental movement of the 1960s was based largely upon a concept of nature that was scientifically constructed by the North (Hays, 1959; Evernden, 1992; Eder, 1996a), and chiefly rooted in the earlier American 'conservation' movement – described as '*organised resource exploitation and regional economic planning*' (O'Riordan, 1981, cited in Reid 1995:25, emphasis added). As the debate became affected by ideas and concepts from the field of development (Redclift, 1987; Adams, 1990; Goulet, 1995a, 1995b), the dialectics of 'environment and development' produced a new discourse, although the North continued to identify the problems and solutions, chiefly from a 'conservation' perspective. The adoption of the term, 'sustainable development', brings with it epistemological and practical problems that have led to strong contestation; but it signifies a transformation being

made in the environmental discourse. The contestation – even repudiation - of the term,[84] as well as its alleged capture to become a key concept in the rhetoric of 'green' business, will be examined in Section 3.4.1 and Chapters Four and Five. Against these negative perceptions, others understand the concept as capable of emancipating more democratic and inclusive approaches to living with nature and each other (O'Connor, 1998); and as legitimating perspectives from the South (Redclift, 1987; Jacobs, 1991).

3.4.1 International Fora as Sites of Contestation

International fora on environment and sustainable development, from the Stockholm Conference in 1972[85] to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002, have tended to legitimate the North's power over and domination of the construct, while appearing to be seeking 'solutions'. They have been organised by the Northern-dominated United Nations and have promoted largely North-driven agendas, even though they have also formed sites of protest. The agendas have been as remarkable for their lacunae as their content; and the significance of the attendance or non-attendance at these fora of key political figures from the North, such as the President of the USA, and their powers of veto, signal where the power lies. Institutional hegemony at these fora has also been shown to be heavily dependent upon the support of corporate power. The fact that collusion between these dominant forces governs the outcomes of international debates on environment and sustainable development has been difficult to overlook. The voices of NGOs and the South have gradually been heard after much struggle, though without achieving equal power.

Such discord between North and South characterised the preparations for the Stockholm Conference (UNCHE, 1972), as it has all subsequent international fora and official rhetoric on environment and sustainable development. The South's

[84] It is perceived as an 'oxymoron' (The Ecologist, 1992; Rich, 1994); a 'dangerous liaison' (Sachs, 1993) or a 'new jargon phrase in the development business' (Conroy and Litvinoff, 1988, cited in Adams, 1990).

[85] The UN Conference on the Human Environment, (UNCHE, Stockholm, 1972).

struggle against a Northern-dominated vision of protecting the environment against industrialism and pollution (Adams, 1990:37) tipped the UNCHE agenda from a focus on 'environmental responsibility' to include the twin moral principle of 'social justice' (Redclift, 1996:13). The exposure of a one-sided discourse that bypassed the concerns of the poor majority, who sought their own right to developmental progress through industrialisation, demonstrated the extent to which the North had taken for granted its economic 'superiority' and scientific 'expertise'. Its agenda rested upon a neo-Malthusian doctrine that was 'deeply unattractive to and mistrusted by' developing country representatives (Adams, 1990:37). The extent to which the views of developing countries actually influenced the discourse of UNCHE remains open to debate. Some new conceptual ground was broken (Adams, 1990); but there was little focus on the dialectics of 'poverty and pollution'[86] – a foretaste of the lacunae of the UNCED debate twenty years later. At the same time, environmentalists contested the 'remedial focus' of limiting damage to the environment without checking development and the apparent determination '*to legalise the environment as an economic externality*' (Colby, 1991:201, original emphasis). Both analyses indicate that the struggle for economic power that was legitimated by the Conference would ensure that the losers would be the environment and the poor of the South. However, in a Foucauldian sense, the capacity of the developing world to exercise the power to influence the international agenda had been demonstrated. It could tilt the domination exercised over the environmental/sustainable development agenda; although the possibility that this would awaken renewed determination to maintain Northern power over the agenda was an outcome to anticipate in later fora.

The World Conservation Strategy (IUCN et al., 1980) did little to allay the South's fears that the North would continue to dominate the agenda. The stated overall aim of achieving sustainable development *'through the conservation of living resources'* (IUCN, 1980:IV, emphasis added) overlooked sensitive and controversial issues of international and political order, war and armaments, population and urbanisation

[86] Several of the Principles and Recommendations produced in the major UNCHE outcome, the 'Declaration on the Human Environment', have been perceived not only as Northern-dominated, but 'mildly eco-fascist' (Adams 1990:39).

(Khosla, 1987).[87] The Strategy foreshadowed the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) definition of sustainable development by focusing on the needs of future generations; but its Judeo-Christian affirmation of domination over nature – and, by implication, humankind – was unpopular, as was the stance on 'scarcity' as opposed to 'redistribution' (Redclift, 1992; Achterhuis, 1993). The strategy was still environment-dominated with pervasive Malthusian overtones, 'repackaged for a new audience' (Adams, 1990:47; Reid, 1995); and it failed to examine the social and political changes that would be necessary to meet its conservation goals (Redclift, 1994). The essentially political nature of the development process was not grasped, the naïve assumption being that 'conservation', rather than being a social construct and essentially political (Eder, 1996a; Redclift, 1987), was above ideology. The Strategy failed to acknowledge that human societies construct their views of nature to reflect human problems and that the Northern construction of environment did not reflect the views of the South.

The power of Northern hegemony met some resistance from the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), which included a large number of Commissioners from the South. The Brundtland Report (1987) placed the discourse much more firmly in the economic and political context of international development. Efforts to limit the agenda to 'environmental' matters and a critique of conventional environmental management as practised in developed countries were resisted (Redclift, 1987). The preliminary consultative process itself provided something of a model of democratic participation (Redclift, 1987); and the Report was altogether more 'political' and radical than the Stockholm Declaration (1972) or the World Conservation Strategy (1980). It took a stance that was more challenging of traditional power structures, acknowledging the inseparability of environmental and development issues and the link between poverty and environment – 'the pollution of poverty' that Indira Ghandi had brought to the attention of the Stockholm Conference (Adams, 1990). It was motivated by the 'egalitarian' concept of sustainable development (Jacobs, 1999) and the concern to find an equitable form

[87] The Strategy's stated goal of 'integration of conservation and development' based on 'a more focused approach to *management* of living resources and ... *policy guidance'* (IUCN, 1980:vi, emphasis added) underlined the potential for ideological dissension and the emerging struggle for 'ownership' of the construct of sustainable development. It framed the goals in a Northern, scientific construction of the problem and a reductionist, managerial 'solution' by experts.

of development (Reid, 1995) closer to the understanding adhered to by the South (Jacobs, 1999). Its dialectics, therefore, focus on the moral imperative of equitable sharing, intra- and inter-generationally, with more even distribution, foreshadowing profound effects for poor and rich. Nevertheless, the fact that the social and economic objectives for sustainable development were based on the premise that further growth was necessary encouraged scepticism among eco-centrists who did not equate the shift to sustainability with the growth paradigm; as well as environmental economists, who feared the surpassing of limits unless quantitative throughput growth could be stabilized and replaced by qualitative development (Daly, 1990, 1992; Goodland et al., 1991; Goodland, 1995). The Commission was castigated as having sold out to the power of big business. The Report emphasized producing more with less (a precept that business has readily absorbed for its profit motive, if not for reasons of sustainability), reduction of population levels and the introduction of a level of redistribution.[88] It catalysed the ongoing debate about the nature and purpose of economic growth, strengthening the discourse about the 'political' role of growth as it dominates not only business but governmental policy-makers and consumers (Ayres, 1998). Its radical force may also have reinforced the determined 'silences' that continue to characterise the debate on sustainable development, particularly in the business discourse.

Despite the criticisms, the Commission presented a political vision of sustainable development: it called for institutional restructuring of national politics, economics, bureaucracy, social systems of production and technologies, requiring a new system of international trade and finance.[89] It was, perhaps, the neo-Marxist movement, newly taking the environment into its consideration in the late 1980s, that best perceived the potential the Report brought for significantly new ways of doing things within a revised capitalist framework. The anticipated need for a five-to-tenfold increase in manufacturing output, the halt to the rising living standards of richer nations and the emphasis upon redistribution brought the Commission closer to a

[88] How such a massive transition from input growth to 'qualitative development' was to be made was not explained, possibly for the politically expedient motive of gaining a wider audience (Goodland et al., 1991; Soussan, 1991). The dilemma for the Commission was how to take a strong stand on fundamental concerns while gaining political acceptance and support (Lélé, 1991).

[89] It was possibly this challenge to the major hegemonic forces of the capitalist economy that led to the Report's being strongly criticised and largely ignored.

Marxian analysis of the environmental problematic, but possibly tolled the Report's death-knell. On account of its compromise with growth, it would be subject to both the force of the eco-centric critique, which dismissed it as a pawn of capitalist hegemony; and to appropriation by business and dilution to fit the business-as-usual paradigm (Soussan, 1992; Goodland et al., 1991). An epistemological perspective on its comparative failure to inspire change is that it offered a *consensus view* of sustainable development where none existed (Smith and Warr, 1991:267). This is still a problem of the discourse today, particularly in the light of limited dialectical discursivity and lack of inclusivity which became a feature of the critique in this inquiry. The Report did, however, offer a challenge to traditional sources of power, of whatever hue, by lifting the debate from a focus on scarcity and counteracting 'the sectoral bias and compartmentalism' that had marked much of the work on the environment (Redclift, 1992:33).

From the perspective adopted in my research, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, 1992), the agenda of which arose largely from the Brundtland Report, demonstrated what may happen to any serious challenge to traditional forms of power. The Conference potentially represented a 'turning point' (Gore, 1992; Frankel, 1998) and the opportunity to address the worsening socio-economic disparities between North and South along with the environmental degradation associated with these. Opinions on the achievement of UNCED divide between confidence in significant progress being made and the belief that the Conference was a failure, even a charade stage-managed by business.[90] [91] The UNCED process exposed that it served powerful interests. The critique of the process and the Alternative Treaties[92] produced by an international consortium of NGOs reveal key 'silences' and 'nondecision-making' that characterised the formal agenda.

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[90] The Ecologist (1992:1) underlined the control and self-promotion that the Conference endorsed: 'The World Bank emerged in control of an expanded Global Environmental Facility, a prize it had worked for two years to achieve. The US got the biodiversity convention it sought simply by not signing the convention on offer. The corporate sector, which throughout the UNCED process enjoyed special access to the secretariat, was confirmed as the key actor in the 'battle to save the planet'. Free-market environmentalism – the philosophy that transnational corporations brought to Rio through the Business Council for Sustainable Development – has become the order of the day, uniting Southern and Northern leaders alike.'

[91] Holmberg et al, 1991; 1993; Luke, 1997.

[92] The 'Alternative' Treaties presented a 'devastating critique' of UNCED (O'Riordan, 1995).

For example, Agenda 21 has clauses on 'enabling the poor to achieve sustainable livelihoods', but none on how the rich would do so; a section on women, but none on men. Only the Alternative Treaties speak of debt forgiveness and redistribution of wealth, or examine issues of militarism, TNCs and alternative economic models. Business, which had played a 'lukewarm' role at UNCHE, but had taken its place in the discourse after Brundtland, now assumed a central role at UNCED.[93] The discourse of the Conference took for granted that economic development was the *sine qua non* – where no growth meant more poverty and degradation to the environment, whereas continued economic growth would protect the environment and reduce both population and poverty.[94]

The UNCED process was an example of the exercise of power by the North to continue its own domination (Rich, 1994) – even though the South had a bargaining chip this time, in that its co-operation was needed for the major conventions. It became clear that industrialised nations were ready to commit much less to the developing nations than had been hoped for. Important connections between institutional, social, environmental and economic policy failed to be made (Redclift, 1996). Climate change, deforestation and biodiversity predominated over the 'issue that Rio forgot' – population - as well as the trade, poverty and debt crisis issues raised in the alternative proceedings. The implications of profligacy, rather than growth, and the neglect of poverty left an agenda still to be dealt with (Redclift, 1996). NGOs were also seen to have made a vast compromise by legitimising a process they had been opposed to. Finger (1993) highlights the UNCED process as accelerating the move towards 'global management', using the environmental crisis as a *pretext* to hasten the establishment of a 'world technocracy', stemming generally from industrial development, which would manage resources and *'so-called* environmental risks' (Finger, op. cit., p. 36, emphasis added). The 'global crisis management' that this would lead to would use fear and threats to legitimise a militaristic and technocratic approach, leaving the world still with a *'profound absence of vision and leadership'* (Finger, op. cit., p. 47, emphasis added). One

[93] The privileged position afforded to business at UNCED is discussed in Chapter Five.

[94] The increased level of growth based upon economic indicators since the early 1950s has been accompanied by the widened gap between rich and poor and the acceleration of environmental destruction (The Ecologist, 1993; Monbiot, 2003).

conclusion that can be drawn from the contestation for sustainable development at the international level is that power in itself does not provide vision or leadership. However, in a Foucauldian sense, that very exercise of power may give impetus to such leadership and vision being emancipated from below.

By the time the final version of this chapter was drafted, no authoritative critique of the WSSD process and outcomes had been published that I could discover.[95] Nevertheless, the development of the 'web' and of specific fora set up to discuss the WSSD agenda and process[96] meant that a considerable amount of dialogue from NGOs and others accompanied the 'formal' discourse. This revealed that corporates had not only continued to exercise enormous power since UNCED, but that governments appeared to have little control over corporate behaviour. This focused especially on the lack of legal instruments and agencies capable of regulating TNCs. The fact that the UN Centre on Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and its Code of Conduct for TNCs had virtually disappeared close to the time of UNCED remained a cause for concern.[97] New guidelines and frameworks were seen as lacking effective authority over corporate behaviour: for example, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (2000) contained the possibility for government intervention, but this was not widely recognised or acted upon (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions/ICFTU, 2002); and the UN Global Compact (2000), which prominent TNCs had signed up to, was viewed as the 'smuggling of a business agenda into the UN' (Bruno and Karliner, 2002). The WBCSD had assumed a prominent role since 1995 as advocate of 'sustainable business'; but this was doing little to alleviate the milieu of 'tremendous inequality' within which its corporate members operated (Bruno and Karliner, 2002). During the decade since UNCED, corporations had lobbied to make a case for their 'sustainable' activities; but not to change an unjust and unsustainable global economic system that was the fundamental obstacle to solving the global environmental and social crisis (Hoedeman, 2002).

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[95] The publication, *'Survival for a Small Planet'*, by Tom Bigg, London: Earthscan, was due to be published in December, 2003.

[96] For example, summit@oneworld.net; www.EarthSummit2002.org

[97] In Chapter Five, I discuss the role of the International Chamber of Commerce in undermining these structures.

A cause of extreme scepticism for many observers was the establishment of Type One (Statutory) and Type Two (Voluntary) partnerships between government, business and NGOs to tackle social and environmental problems in developing countries. This was perceived by some as NGOs selling out to business; and as paving the way for more corporate business opportunities. Government reliance on corporations to keep national economies afloat underlined the inability to put the required regulations in place without corporate retribution, so that government focus was perforce on the immediate rather than the future.[98] It was proposed that what was needed was a new 'Global Deal' – sustainable development legislation wherein corporates, civil society and governments could negotiate a binding international convention on the key issues. However, this did not emerge from the WSSD; and the idea of a rule-based International Institute for Sustainability was rejected by the USA.

3.5 The Discourse of Sustainable Development – Problematising the Concept

This brief genealogy of sustainable development and the contestation for the concept at international level exposes the power and hegemony exercised in the struggle for 'ownership' and definition of the concept. It discloses why the discourse has been narrowly controlled and why a dialectical, relational approach is needed to open up the still-evolving process (Harvey, 1996). A more dialectical approach might produce, not a two-dimensional, undialectic 'map', but something more discursive, akin to multi-dimensional 'cognitive mapping' of the many discourses of sustainable development. The importance of maintaining discursivity is that it is the discourse that is 'creating' sustainable development (Foucault, 1978); the process is a dynamic one, where the concept should not be allowed to become a naturalised, 'reified' thing (Foucault, 1972). It comes down to a struggle between discursivity and control, an inherently ideological process (Redclift, 1996) which is witnessed at international level and within the evolving discourse in New Zealand, where power struggles for 'ownership' of the concept are becoming overt. The international literature reflects the 'stakes in the ground' of specific groups:[99] economics, ecology, environmental

[98] www. Earthsummit2002.org/es/life/default/htm.

[99] See Tisdell (1988).

management, environmental philosophy, the claims and contestations of academic disciplines, views from the South and political and corporate positions all reveal the political, ideological, epistemological, discipline-based and philosophical approaches that compete for legitimacy. Broadly speaking, these fall into three major camps: ecology-centred, market-based and neo-Marxist approaches. The theorisation of my research in Critical Theory, Foucauldian theory and the social science literature is employed to critique market-based approaches on sustainable development. From this critical perspective, sustainable development is perceived, not only as a social construct, but a multi-constructed and strongly contested concept (Eder, 1996b) that is political and radical (Jacobs, 1991). The dismissive charge of 'vacuousness' that has been made needs to be explored to discover whether such 'vacuity' is used as an obfuscatory gag on the radical aspects of the concept - a way of excluding competing views in the struggle for ownership - or whether the concept is, indeed, vapid jargon.

3.5.1 'Sustainable Development' or 'Sustainability'?

The contestation for the definition of sustainable development[100] is made additionally problematic by the ways in which the terms, 'sustainable development' and 'sustainability', have been counter-posed. For purists, the terms are almost diametrically opposed, sustainable *development* representing a threat to sustainability on account of its 'dangerous liaison', particularly since the Brundtland Report, with economic growth. This liaison smacks of positivism and modernism, since the concept is seen as emanating from the very cultural and economic sources that gave rise to 'unsustainability'. Much of the concern focuses upon Northern domination and the assumption that (Northern) 'management' can solve the sustainable development dilemma. The increasing domination and 'eco-cracy' (Gudynas, 1993) stems from the fact that, institutionally, we have bought into an all-engulfing management paradigm (Redclift, 1996) that introduces new institutional structures for *environmental management*[101] that give scant attention to the actual processes

[100] See, for example, Pezzey, 1989; Munro, 1995.

[101] Environmentalists themselves have bought into the prevalent management paradigm, calling for *better management strategies*, where once they called for *new public virtues* such as democracy, local self-reliance and cultural diversity, all championed within a 'spirit of contention' (Sachs, 1993:xv).

through which the environment has been transformed and commodified. Against this is the body of opinion that believes that sustainable development does encapsulate the understanding of the need for radical change to a different way of life – what has been characterised as a 'painfully difficult turn towards material simplicity and spiritual richness' (Worster, 1993: 132). In this sense, it is a strongly normative goal imbued with values and implying that value judgements need to be made (Redclift, 1996): a social goal for guiding behaviour at individual, institutional, national and global levels. This shifts sustainable development out of the paradigm of management where business locates the concept. It also confirms it as a political concept. It is not surprising, then, that discussions of sustainable development generally ignore the epistemological dimension of the construct, the assumption being that Northern knowledge and expertise have developed a 'universal epistemology'; whereas, in reality, the ubiquity of Northern science succeeds in fragmenting the knowledge of the South (Redclift, 1991), even though this knowledge may be increasingly important in terms of sustainable development.

Some argue that the ambiguous theoretical basis of sustainable development and the lack of consensus about its meaning make its implementation almost impossible: there are conceptual, political and ethical dilemmas in recasting 'development' activities as 'sustainable', and then declaring this a new paradigm for human interaction with the environment (Sneddon, 2000). In its mainstream guise, sustainable development is in danger of privileging *global* environmental problems and global (i.e. *'powerful local'*, Shiva, 1993) institutions which are largely the province of the North, and which choose to focus, for example, on the *problem* of poverty rather than the origins of poverty-*production*. This curtails the ability of the concept to act as an instrument for a 'transformative politics'; whereas the concept of 'sustainability' is seen as not having been co-opted into the unilinear, mainstream hegemony to the same degree (Sneddon, 2000; Adams, 1995b; Sunderlin, 1995). It 'carries less political baggage' (Paehlke, 1999), sparing us some of the problems associated with sustainable development. It is seen as having a 'multiplicity' of meanings; for example, leaving open the question of GNP (Paehlke, 1999:243), whereas sustainable development assumes that growth is possible and desirable. Both terms view the economy, the environment and society as inevitably bound up with each other; but sustainability does not assume that economic growth is essential - *nor*

that economic growth will inevitably result in net environmental harm (Paehlke, 1999).

However, like sustainable development, *sustainability* has a 'complex conceptual structure' (Paehlke, 1999:246), and is also deplored for its 'vague, ill-defined character' (Becker, Jahn and Stiess, 1999). It is also seen as introducing 'normative commitments to the development problematic', calling for justice for future generations and implying that the economic process should be 'subordinated to social and ecological constraints' (Becker, Jahn and Stiess, 1999:5). This strongly accords with the conception of sustainable development propounded by Redclift and others. Despite the calls for sustainability to be extricated from the sustainable development discourse – or to replace it – there is also evidence that a number of writers have in mind an all-embracing concept that eschews neo-classical economics, calls for better understanding and treatment of nature, demands social equity and eco-justice based on a less instrumental understanding of democracy, and that this overall conception of 'the good life' is sometimes referred to as 'sustainability', and sometimes as 'sustainable development'.

3.5.2 A Question of Definition: Competing Certainties Versus Discourse

> We often think of definition as a cornerstone of reason – as our protection against superstition, prejudice and ignorance. A definition is therefore intended to clarify things, to free us for action. But what we have seen in our society is that definition can just as easily become a means of control, a profoundly reactionary force.
>
> John Ralston Saul, *On Equilibrium,* 2001.

Part of the 'problem' of sustainable development is the contestation for its definition: so intrinsically political is the concept that it elicits attempts by widely disparate vested interests to frame its meaning. The power of definition, and of determining the language that characterises a concept, are seminal ways of staking and holding claims to domination (Beder, 1996; Livesey, 2001); while dismissing that concept on account of its *lack* of clear definition also restricts any inherent potential for change from being liberated. The debate on sustainable development has ranged from a call for consensus on a definition that can lead to action (Carpenter, 1994, in Sneddon,

2000) to proposals that the term be abandoned on account of it 'vacuity' and 'malleability' (Lélé, 1991; Sneddon, 2000) and its lack of 'objective analysis' (Reboratti, 1999). Redclift notes that it is 'about meeting human needs, *or* maintaining economic growth, *or* conserving natural capital, *or* all three' (1999:37, emphasis added). The alleged vagueness and ill-defined character of the concept (Becker and Jahn, 1999) has been attributed both to a lack of theoretical underpinning and to the ways in which the concept itself was constructed and framed (Sneddon, 2000). Built upon the dual and opposing concepts of ecological sustainability and development/growth, the complexity of the construct promulgates not only different and conflicting theoretical perspectives, but also the ensuing 'semantic confusion' that arises from these (Sachs, 1999). Its conceptual capacity and the normative and political dimensions of the concept only increase the ambiguity: it has come to be used *as though* it has 'universal and temporal validity' and general acceptance (Reboratti, 1999:209; Smith and Warr, 1991), while, at the same time, lack of objective analysis has led to its being dismissed as a cliché.

Some perceive the ideological repackaging of the discourse of development planning in the 1980s as a cynical attempt to construct a 'green cover' for business-as-usual and the ongoing exploitation of people and resources (Willers, 1994; Adams, 1995; Escobar, 1995): a political cover for otherwise unacceptable corporate practices (Paehlke, 1999) and an attempt at 'semantic reconciliation' of the irreconcilable ideologies of ecological transformation and economic growth. The lack of clear definition of sustainable development – its 'opaqueness' – is also seen as symptomatic of this underlying ideological struggle. However, it might also be argued that the failure to deliver a tight definition reflects the futility – even the danger – of trying to capture a complex construct in simplistic terms.[102] Perhaps the most serious aspect of the problematic for 'sustainable development' is that the ambiguous theoretical basis and lack of context-specificity and clarity (Sneddon, 2000) disables *implementation* of a concept that does not have time on its side (Redclift, 1987; Lélé, 1991; Frazier, 1997). The dismissal of the concept as a force for power has been widespread: its 'populism' is seen as resulting in confusion and

[102] Similar difficulties are associated with other fundamentally political 'meta-constructs' such as 'freedom' and 'justice' when it comes to precise, contextual definition; yet there is a broad core of understanding of what they signify.

ambiguity (Lélé, 1991; Redclift, 1991; Reboratti, 1999), reducing it to a 'quasi-rhetorical term' and a 'must word' (Reboratti, 1999). Lack of academic rigour in the initial formulation of the term has relegated it to the popular status of a 'catch-phrase' (Lélé, 1991), with an accompanying 'fuzziness' surrounding its definition and interpretation. Indiscriminate use of the term disguises the fact that it is 'hard to pin down and convert into a useful methodological tool' (Reboratti, 1999): even the 'relatively acceptable' WCED needs-based definition focusing on inter- and intra-generational equity is dismissed as 'wishful thinking rather than conceptual framework' (Reboratti, op. cit., p. 213). It has lost further credibility and meaning on account of the ease with which it has 'passed into the everyday language of politicians' (O'Brien, 1991) with the consequent danger of losing all meaning; although it has not impacted substantially on the *platforms* of political parties (Reboratti, 1999). The other cause of scepticism is the ease with which the construct has been colonised by business and become part of its own rhetoric.

The debate reflects the contestation by those who aim to neutralise the potentially political role that lies at the heart of the concept. This prevents serious change from taking place (Lélé, 1991) and disempowers its radical core of meaning. The general use of the concept indicates a poor understanding of causes of poverty and environmental degradation, confusion about the role of economic growth, lack of clarity about the concepts of sustainability and *participation*, with all of this constraining the democratic force of the concept (Lélé, 1991) – views which my empirical research confirms. It has also been argued that the vagueness surrounding the concept forms part of its 'appeal' (Redclift, 1991): it can mean different things to ecologists, environmental planners, economists, business people and activists. Such 'vagueness' may be a politically expedient aspect of the concept, not only to play down its potential power, but also to emancipate that power (Lélé, 1991): a more specific definition might represent a reactionary force, a means of control that restricts discourse (Ralston Saul, 2001). In other words, the 'ambiguity'[103] of the

[103] Jacobs (1999) identifies the irony of this 'ambiguity' that may have enabled the development of a radical discourse of sustainable development to emerge *'under the noses'* of the very structures that the concept opposes and that have, in turn, attempted to appropriate and neutralise sustainable development.

concept may be its central virtue and strength, inviting discourse (Redclift, 1987; O'Riordan, 1988; Wilbank, 1994, in Reboratti, 1999).

At the heart of the debate is the question of power, and, specifically, the potential for political and structural change that is central to a radical interpretation of sustainable development. Its political significance is underlined in part by the fact that it has been generated through the power of Northern institutions, as well as academic debate (Reboratti, 1999). At the same time, the lack of specificity clouds its *normative* role as a social goal which can only be achieved through examination of our own behaviour (Redclift, 1996), not 'fixed' by management and technology. For Redclift, it is a policy objective rather than a methodology – an over-arching concept and 'unapologetically normative' (1996:37), calling for a more 'human-focused' approach. The discourse is full of contradictions. Borrowing from the natural and social sciences, the concept is seen as a major constraint on human 'progress' – the price the conventional growth model must pay if the 'biospheric imperative' is ignored, calling for different technologies and more realistic assessment of environmental losses. Another contradiction concerns the implications of 'human progress' for nature, with people from different ideological persuasions calling for an examination of the 'ends' as well as the 'means' of development. At the heart of the problem are the unanswered questions about recovery of our control over consumption (Redclift, 1996). The Brundtland Report's focus on 'needs' still left unanswered questions about needs of future generations, changes in needs, ways in which development contributes to or creates needs, and how needs are defined in different cultures. No answer has been found to the question of *what* is to be sustained (Redclift, 1999:60). Redclift defines the key question as being distributive, calling for a re-definition that would incorporate future population growth and the ensuing demands on the environment, as well as necessary changes in individual consumption patterns. The discourse rarely stops to examine those real needs (largely of the South and the poor of the North) that are consistently not met (Durning, 1992; Elkington, 1995); and this brings the heart of the problem back to the materiality of the environmental experience without which culture itself cannot exist (Ingold, 1992, in Redclift, 1999). Concepts of nature are always cultural statements (Beinart and Coates, 1995; Redclift, 1999), and the 'environment' is the creation of human activity, socially constructed like all discourses, and based upon ecological principles

that are themselves constructs of a science that is part of human culture (Redclift, op. cit., p. 67).

One danger of the contestation over definition is that it will deflect attention from these unanswered questions that signify the need for an essentially political project for bringing about shifts in human behaviour (Munton, 1996). Competition over definition helps to obscure the more basic need to redefine the roles and functions of public and private institutions which support unsustainable behaviour – not only business, but political and administrative institutions. It is a political act to contest the definition of sustainable development, and the endless contestation may cover up embarrassing questions such as government unwillingness to promote, for example, major fiscal or financial reforms; or to significantly decentralise power; or to recognise that scientific knowledge as a basis for 'rational' decision-making has limitations. In a sense, the debate about definition can be seen as a displacement activity or a deliberate barrier to the recognition of the sustainable development imperative. Capitalism has ideological mechanisms for silencing opposition (O'Connor, 1994), one being the act of 'semiotic conquest' of language and agenda. Endless contestation deflects the radical core of sustainable development into a confusing, de-energising struggle for 'meaning' rather than action. In terms of business, the capitalist appropriation of nature and communities is seen by O'Connor as attempting to find its own legitimation through the 'sinister double play' of the rhetoric of 'greened growth' as opposed to a focus on sustainable development. Radical constructions of sustainable development view it as a potentially energising force in its own right (Dovers, 1989; Redclift, 1987; O'Connor, M., 1994; O'Riordan and Voisey, 1997), having the potential to create important social change, but calling for a myriad of institutional changes that are not necessarily promoted by the sustainable development agenda. This radical view suggests that many strategies will be employed to obscure or dilute that power, not least by capitalist business itself.

For social change to take place, there needs to be, not a 'definition', but some consensus about the *core meaning* of the term and the moral imperative it offers for 'the good life'. This is not easy when the concept is viewed as propping up the fundamental processes of capitalist exploitation (Jacobs, 1999:22). The demand for a cut-and-dried - and, therefore, almost inevitably 'technological' – definition raises

the spectre of 'reason' metamorphosing into 'technology' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947, in Lash et al., 1996), already seen in the domination and instrumentalisation of nature. A dialectical approach to sustainable development, not pinned to a specific definition, would be more likely to question the instrumentalist epistemic shift of science in the 1920s, the rapid growth of big bureaucracies in public administration, humanity's colonisation of nature through technology and the capitalist management of the administrative apparatus of the state that worked together to create the need for the construct. Such dialectical discourse would be more likely to unearth the origins of the term, and the archaeology of the institutional infrastructure that supports these systems. Shifting from 'definition' to 'discourse' might elevate the power of sustainable development as a 'site of political contest', the source of a new political worldview that contests the status quo (Jacobs, 1999).

The areas of core meaning that characterise this view of the political power of sustainable development, as identified by Jacobs (1991), are neither 'empty' nor 'insignificant':

- The entrenchment of environmental considerations in economic policy-making;
- A commitment to equity;
- An appreciation that 'development' is wider than growth.

Based on this, any interpretation implies change for economic policy and exposes the additional conflict that sustainable development is the beginning, not the end, of the debate: it provides a 'common currency', bringing together conflicting vocabularies to a common, though contested, one (Jacobs, 1999). The focus on social equity, global justice and human rights presents a constructivist interpretation based on human relations, culture and politics (Lash et al., 1996). This moves away from the major response since Brundtland, focused on 'managing' the earth through technological expertise, and the framing of the concept by powerful groups of the North (Becker, 1999). Nevertheless, much of the debate has continued to focus on 'definition' rather than imperatives; and the business incursion into the debate has increased the focus on both definition and 'management'.

3.5.3 The Crux of the Problem: A 'Dangerous Liaison'

> What should be the end of man (*sic*), and how should he choose his means? Economic rationalism, in the strict sense, has no answer to these questions, for they imply motivations and valuations of a moral and practical order that go beyond the irresistible, but otherwise empty, exhortation to be 'economical'.
>
> Polanyi, 1977.

The compromise constructed between sustainable development and economic growth suggests that equity, conservation and economic growth, while uncomfortable companions, are not incompatible (Jacobs, 1991). Opponents view this as 'a fatal co-option' into technocentric management designed not to disturb the power processes of the growth economy and capitalist exploitation (Reboratti, 1999:22). Sustainable development has become part of the historical process linked to economics and political structures, transformed both existentially and by economic growth, but inextricably linked with the expansion and contraction of the world economic system (Redclift, 1987). However, it calls for a competing paradigm that breaks with the linear model of growth and accumulation. This would be more inclusive, with economic forces seen as related to the behaviour of social classes and the role of the state in accumulation. The social and environmental impacts of capitalist development would not be regarded as beyond the aegis of market economics: they would no longer be permitted as 'externalities born chiefly by those without power, and which now need to be internalised within the economic model' (Redclift, 1987:13). By strengthening the emphasis upon human need, the Brundtland Report itself provided an opportunity for a radical shift away from an economics epistemologically predisposed to a modernist, reductionist view of resources and exchange value (Norgaard, 1989). Nevertheless, it is a 'dangerous liaison' (Sachs, 1991; 1999): an attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable (Benton, 1999). It can be read as appropriation of the agenda of environmental responsibility and social justice by economists, still reliant upon economic instruments for environmental protection; and no more than a vehicle for 'free market environmentalism' dominated by neo-classical concepts for allocating resources (Beder, 1996:89). International agencies such as the OECD and fora such as UNCED have favoured such ideologically-based market solutions; but others see it as resulting in economic valuation that is another

kind of 'semiotic conquest' (O'Connor, J., 1994), converting ecological entity to 'natural capital' and placing it on a par with other forms of capital.[104]

It seems improbable that any agreement about sustainable development that adheres to the core themes identified in this chapter can be based on current global, cultural and political tradition (Reboratti, 1999). Rather, it needs a new social covenant and a new set of 'rules', including economic rules and ways of thinking about growth. For example, instead of following the neo-liberal theory of the free play of markets as the system of economic regulation, economic activity would be re-located within society (Gowdy, 1999). An emancipatory shift of this kind might mean learning from the complex social systems that have been sustained for long periods of time by people in the South (Clarke, 1977), but which are destroyed as they conflict with the economic philosophies of the North (Shiva, 1991; 1993; Gudynas, 1993). Such a powerfully different conception of the role of economics in creating the 'good life' is encapsulated in the ongoing debate around 'weak' and 'strong' conceptions of sustainability (O'Riordan, 1981; 1988; Redclift, 1987; Daly and Cobb, 1989; Reed and Slaymaker, 1993; Gray et al., 1993; Bebbington and Thomson, 1996). Such a mapping of the above constructions of sustainable development on a 'weak-strong' continuum provided me with the heuristic I employ for the interpretation of the evidence from the empirical research, based on a continuum that extends from the technocratic ('weak') conception of sustainable development to the political, progressive ('strong') end of the debate. This heuristic is presented and discussed in Chapter Five.

3.6 Concluding Comments

The dominant and contested discourses on sustainable development overviewed in this Chapter indicate that a more discursive theorisation of the concept is emerging that challenges the control and hegemony that have been exercised over the discourse. The radical themes of this discourse resonate with the epistemological

[104] Harvey (1996:156) points out that economic valuation represents a double-edged sword for its critics: they must beware of either eschewing monetary evaluation of nature and thus remaining 'irrelevant' to the political debate; or risk reducing complex ecological processes to 'the crude language of money'.

questions raised by the theoretical framework of my thesis. They question reified institutions and the domination of the globalised economy, subjecting them to deconstruction of their origins and purposes, and their agendas in appropriating sustainable development. Critical Theory and Foucauldian questions uncover asymmetrical relationships of power and well-protected silences. They set in place the need and the space for emancipatory shifts to what history has set in place, but which is 'not allowed to settle' (Foucault, 1972); and make thinkable opposition to the modern meta-theory of economic rationality promoted through capitalist development by one that is based upon environmental justice, equity and ecological rationality (O'Connor, 1998). A narrative of 'the good life' emerges that is characterised by democratic participation (Jacobs, 1991) and deliberative democracy (O'Mahoney and Skillington, 1996; Dryzek, 2000). Such a vision is based on constructing sustainable development as problematic: not a discourse of environment and conservation and growing 'eco-cracy', but one of social crisis and human agency. The themes are echoed by voices from the South which also locate the roots of the crisis in global and Northern institutions which need democratising (Shiva, 1993). The agendas of social and political institutions, and the institutionalisation of the sustainable development agenda itself, need to be questioned (Redclift, 1992; Martinez-Alier, 1999; Sachs, 1993). This opposing discourse of emancipation pre-supposes radical forms of political democracy (O'Connor, M., 1994:vii). To construct an 'ecological' society, we need liberal democratic forms of institutions and policies. This envisions a very different agenda from the one promulgated by corporations and the institutions that support them; and from the theorisation of business and 'greening' that largely constructs their case. These opposing positions are examined in Chapters Four and Five.

Chapter Four

Management Theory and Sustainable Development

> Business is the only mechanism powerful enough to reverse global environmental and social degradation.
>
> Paul Hawken,[105] *'The Ecology of Commerce: How business can save the planet'*, 1993.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter occupies a key place in the development of the inquiry and in setting the scene for the empirical research. It explores themes identified in the earlier chapters, but from the perspective of traditional and emerging theoretical conversations about management, and provides a critique of these. The synthesized intertextual coherence constructed from Critical Theory, Foucauldian theory and the social science literature provides the lens for this critique. Management theory represents the ontological framework of the College of Business where I work, and part of my research role has been to supply an institutional and theoretical critique based upon my teaching and research in the area of business and sustainable development.[106] A major gap explored in the thesis is the failure of orthodox management theory to address the 'problem' of sustainable development. I argue that the traditional theoretical underpinnings of the mechanisms of business have played a part in the relegation of environmental and social issues to the level of 'externalities': nature and people have been regarded as resources to be used for profit.

Two 'emerging' orthodoxies that have gained purchase in management theory over the last decade are also investigated. The first is the increasing employment of 'critical' theory, and sometimes Critical Theory, to critique management theory and practice. These 'lenses' have been employed so far to problematise chiefly 'traditional' areas of managerial capitalism – leadership, culture, human resource

[105] After Hawken's involvement in the anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle in 1999, and the experience of police force exercised against passive demonstrators, he began to see the demonstration in terms of citizens struggling against a worldwide corporate-financed oligarchy or plutocracy, and free markets as subverting culture, democracy and community (www.global-vision.org/misc/hawken1.html).

[106] Springett, D.V. and Kearins, K., 2001.

management, for example, as well as business 'disciplines'. Only lip-service has been paid to sustainable development in this discourse, or, at least, to the 'environmental' agenda. The second new 'orthodoxy' is the 'green business-as-usual' agenda that I critique as eco-modernism[107] or 'political sustainability'.[108] In so far as this literature has sought to address sustainable development, it has chiefly engaged at a superficial level with the emerging 'green management orthodoxy' that business favours; and may even have contributed to the appropriation of the concept. Both of the new orthodoxies of management reveal further gaps in the research that I seek to tease out as part of the research problem by critiquing these discourses from a framework of Critical Theory. They have failed to fully address the agenda of sustainable development. They have generally disregarded the structural basis of *un*sustainability in the means of production and consumption, as well as the power of dominant hegemonic coalitions that threaten to accommodate the concept. While the emerging 'critical' theory of management has largely ignored the sustainable development agenda, the green business orthodoxy promotes a benign paradigm of more 'management' through eco-modernism.

The critique of 'traditional' management theory and practice has been conducted since the 1970s,[109] and I draw upon that critique and supplement it with my own. The perspective I develop is that the nature of orthodox management theory plays a role in creating and supporting the institutions and systems that render business values, attitudes and practices largely inimical to sustainability; and that it is core to the exploitation of people and the environment that can be laid at the door of corporations (Korten, 1995). The belief that the ecological impacts of mass production and the dissipative pollution of consumption can largely be attributed to asymmetrical power in the relations of production (Hudson, 1995) is generally repressed in the management literature. The fact that management orthodoxy is antithetical to the core radical themes of sustainable development has resulted in resistance to any significant engagement in the discourse and a major 'silence' in the literature.

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[107] See Hajer, 1995; 1996.

[108] See Levy, 1997.

[109] See, for example, Mintzberg, 1975; Weick, 1979; Jackall, 1988; Watson, 1994; Alvesson and Willmott, 1996.

The management literature has evolved rapidly over the past fifty years. Numerous shifts and trends are recorded and many new 'theories' have been propounded and absorbed. These have, in effect, had little impact on the fundamentally positivist managerial paradigm of power, with its hierarchical structures built upon knowledge-power connections and its ability to drive out competing discourses. This hegemony is maintained either by steadfastly ignoring alternative discourses such as that of sustainable development, or through the more insidious mechanism of appropriation and accommodation of an ideologically threatening agenda to one of 'business-as-usual'. I contend that the 'green' business orthodoxy of eco-modernism has done little to challenge this hegemonic power or the ensuing appropriation: it might even have empowered business to develop a new rhetoric, with new symbolism and semiotic codes, that contrives to carry out the more effective and complete capture of the radical aspects of sustainable development while perpetuating corporate 'legitimacy'. Chapter Five develops the perspective that the corporate world has actively set about shaping environmentalism to its own ends as it engages with 'green' issues, and has hindered progress towards sustainable development (Mayhew, 1997). This also suggests that business practice has been somewhat ahead of the theorizing of researchers and business educators, who are often stymied by institutional inertia (Gladwin et al., 1995; Roome, 1998). Business has assumed the role of leader or 'evangelist' in the turn to 'sustainable business', while repressing the true causes of environmental and social degradation (Welford, 1998; 2000).

4.2 The Legacy of Orthodox Management Theory

[*Maneggiare* (Italian): 'to handle a horse']

The empirical research focuses on conceptions of sustainable development held by managers in corporate and other key settings, and rests to a large extent upon how the role of management is itself constructed. The *maneggiare* metaphor is central to organisational theory, and encapsulates the understanding that managers comprise a self-appointed élite (Orsatto and Clegg, 1999). This is central to the 'received wisdom' of the management paradigm, where managers are perceived as 'heroes' carrying out work that is vital to society (Mintzberg, 1975). Alvesson's study of the management literature concludes that management interests are: '... grounded in a

worldview, a set of beliefs and values, which indicate that top managers of corporations and other organisations are a highly important group, whose actions are normally supposed to support the social good (whatever that may be)' (1991:217). Organisations and the 'knowledge' they utilise are grounded in asymmetric power relations, while the 'carceral' gaze of the corporation takes in all areas of managerial work (McKinlay and Starkey, 1998:111, drawing upon Foucault). Managers play a central role in maintaining the professional management paradigm that is portrayed as opening the door to the 'good society' through a universal process comprising largely technical functions. Socially and politically based problems are generally considered amenable to such 'technical' solutions. In the last two decades, therefore, the management paradigm has also been employed in the environmental sphere, both in terms of 'managing' the environment itself and managing the 'environmental responsibilities' of companies. The distinction between 'managers' and 'managed' is taken for granted in this paradigm: the hierarchical, technical, universal, politically 'neutral' process of managing – 'getting things done' – is seen as 'given' and unproblematical. It reflects a system invented for manufacturing that is no longer appropriate for the evolving nature of work. The fact that scientific management theories are necessarily formulated within politically-charged and value-laden contexts is largely ignored or silenced. 'Scientific' management theories have exercised power to legitimate the technocratic understanding of management, while other forms of knowledge that might impact on management have been deemed 'suspect', 'subjective' or 'subversive' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996) and have been repressed. Management as a 'technical activity' has overlooked the social relations upon which it depends and which are necessary to carry out the managerial work (Whittington, 1992); while proving patently incapable of addressing the escalating social and ecological problems that characterise the modern world (Lipietz, 1992).

Managers are not necessarily unaware of the contradictions of their work, or of the fact that they, too, are managed in a 'velvety grip' (McKinlay and Starkey, 1998). However, the norms of management and the nature of their education and training by and large give them little insight into the environmental and social problems they encounter. They are trained to privilege their claims of technical, instrumental

reason, and to exclude subjective, though important, information.[110] Everything is done in the name of impartiality, professionalism and functional importance (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). This fails to take into account Giddens' warning (1990:40) that 'No knowledge under conditions of modernity is knowledge in the "old" sense, where "to know" is to be "certain"'. This warning is particularly apt at the nexus where management theory meets the complexity of a new, ontologically 'tough', concept like sustainable development. Furthermore, the presentation of management as a predominantly technical activity gives the impression of 'neutrality' to an activity that is intrinsically value-laden. Management theory has, therefore, been 'sanitized' and its practice distanced from the structures of power and interest that are both a condition and consequence of its practice (Willmott, 1984; 1987).

Alvesson and Deetz (2000:5), adopting a critical approach to management research, point out that management as a concept and category 'is a social construction filled with history and political motives'. Conventional perspectives on management, comprising the basic functions of planning, co-ordinating and controlling, emphasize the role of power inherent in the paradigm, and how asymmetric power controls the content of the discourse, both what is included and what is excluded (Lukes, 1974). It has been revealed that the 'reality' within this paradigm of domination is often messy, ambiguous, fragmented and political (Mintzberg, 1975; Jackall, 1988). Managers, despite the 'control' they exercise, are not necessarily good at managing - a theme that emerged in the empirical research - and examples of dysfunctional management are rife. The common assumption that the dominant rational positivistic paradigm that underlies management theory is 'extremely robust', and the belief that, as long as we can quantify the problem we can solve it, are questioned (Smith, 1993). Definitions of the 'work' of management have become more eclectic, covering many kinds of responsibilities (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). What remains constant, however, is that managers are powerful and busy; and their work is driven by market competition and issues of short-term economic performance. The power integral to their roles places them in a position to exercise and even abuse their 'representational

[110] Management education and the reductionism of the MBA degree have taken their share of criticism for creating 'a culture of omnipotence' amongst learners (Smith, 1993); while Levy (1997) suggests that business school academics are in danger of acting as Gramsci's (1988) 'traditional intellectuals', captured to propagate the theories and practices that support the dominant paradigm.

power' in broader settings than the immediate business arena (Mayhew, 1997), which the institutional coalitions between business and government reveal. These features of management are now employed in constructing and managing the 'problem' of sustainable development.

However, powerfully controlling 'experts' may, in reality, be ever less in control of their own work sphere or their personal lives; and the turbulence of business in New Zealand in recent years has resulted in many executives losing their 'power' – which is not to say, of course, that the power itself disappears. The threat of a major paradigm shift, such as sustainable development signifies, suggests that power may be more fiercely clung to by companies and institutions and exercised ever more forcefully, including management and control over the concept of sustainable development itself. The 'control' upon which the management ethos is founded, and the modernist assumptions that underpin that control, may be profoundly challenged by the sustainable development agenda, depending upon how the concept is understood and employed. It is therefore a logical managerial step to capture the concept into management hegemony – to tame its complexity and its radical potential. Management strategy and the instrumental reasoning that underpins it have already been strained by such new themes as 'corporate culture', 'identity', 'quality management', 'service management', new calls for leadership, and even for 'soul' and 'charisma' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Sustainable development represents a further assault on the taken-for-granted agenda. The vulnerability that the management model is beginning to reveal – the fact that it is no longer stable or unchallenged – opens up a possible site of contestation (Gramsci, 1988). Through a dialectical discourse of sustainable development, this essential weakness of management may be exposed.[111] This also suggests that such a process will be contested and that structural limits will be imposed on any attempts to practise progressive agency for sustainable development. The ways in which such structural limits are imposed are examined in the evidence from the empirical research.

Despite 'theories' of management and rhetoric about changing the nature of management through devolution of power, decentralisation of company operations

[111] See Harvey (1996) in Chapter One.

and sharing of responsibility, the hierarchical structures of companies and their reliance upon power still prevail (Jackall, 1988; Lipietz, 1992). Corporate managers themselves describe systems as remaining 'very centralised', with 'hierarchical individualism' operating to reproduce the necessary socio-economic arrangements of the capitalist economy as well as executive power (Fineman, 1996; Mayhew, 1997). From a societal perspective, corporate managers can even be seen as setting the frameworks and vocabularies for many of society's public issues (Jackall, 1988).[112] One of the arguments developed in my thesis is that corporate power is now re-surfacing in a different guise as corporate leaders and business organisations turn their attention to sustainable development, forming hegemonic élites around the concept to determine its meaning and the parameters of business engagement with it, and to assume control of decision-making and nondecision-making (Lukes, 1974).

Deconstruction of management policies reveals that hierarchical corporate bureaucracy continues to prevent significant change from taking place in the nature of management, despite 'new' theories of management. Its modernist agenda still promotes the instrumentalisation of nature and people through the power of 'scientific-technical' knowledge, modelled on the positivism of the sciences (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). The 'representational power' of élites (Mayhew, 1997), and the abuse of that power, prevent egalitarian or discursive democratic perspectives from being developed. 'New' organisational structures – such as employee participation and 'team-work' – might be seen as even more insidious forms of control and domination, further permeating the life-world of workers, rather than vehicles to emancipation and empowerment. Through 'softer' but more powerful forms of exploitation, corporations employ micro-scale regulation of the labour process, with workers learning to discipline themselves and fellow-workers 'within and through the rhetoric of team-work' (Hudson, 1995:43). For example, the eco-modernist practices of the workplace, with the emphasis on eco-efficiency, may represent an example of how power can both 'subject' and 'subjectify' (Minson,

[112] This was witnessed in New Zealand from the mid-1980s through the pervasive influence of the New Zealand Business Roundtable, comprising top corporate executives who propounded their own theories on many issues, including, for example, education.

1986:113-4).[113] 'Human resource management' structures, ostensibly set up to look after employees, and now cited by companies as part of their 'social agenda', become part of the 'corporate Panopticon', whereby workers strategise their own subordination and are 'accomplices' in their own exploitation (Burawoy, 1985:10).

The management literature has been characterised as 'self-referential': seeking answers to only a limited range of questions and ideas which often relate to technical refinement of established practice rather than fundamental change. Thus, it effectively silences discourse about the true causes and the scale of the environmental crisis. Mainstream management theory has been categorised as 'tunnel-visioned and dangerous – practically as well as intellectually, ecologically as well as culturally' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992:3).[114] It has not addressed the fundamental question currently facing the world: 'How do we wish to live and what is the role of organisations in such living?' (Gladwin et al., 1995:874). It has failed to challenge the normative conception of capitalist development (Hudson and Weaver, 1997:1651), or to address issues of equity, equality and futurity that are central to a radical conception of sustainable development (Welford, 1995).

This brief overview of the 'gap' or 'problem' that is part of the dilemma of orthodox management theory, with its origins in scientific rationalism and positivism, helps to explain why sustainable development will not easily assume a radical position in the management discourse. Its democratic agenda challenges values rooted in power and domination, hierarchical structures, constrained discourse and control over emancipation. What has emerged more insidiously is the successful exertion of the traditional power of management over that concept: it is in the process of appropriation, 'tamed' to equate to a level of social and environmental engagement which corporate ideology can easily accommodate without undergoing

[113] This can also be witnessed in the 'panopticisms' of everyday life employed to construct the 'green' employee who diligently switches off lights and recycles paper in place of any real shift towards sustainable development on the part of the company.

[114] As Alvesson and Willmott point out, management, a construct of modernity, propounds mainly 'singular truths' which are at odds with the organic interconnectedness of living and non-living things that was formerly reflected in traditional worldviews and which is central to sustainable development today. From this view, management is a powerful extension of scientific rationalism. It suffers from 'a fractured epistemology that separates humanity from nature and truth from morality' (Gladwin et al., 1995:874).

transformative change. This model has been termed 'eco-modernism', signifying business' accommodation of the environmental problematic which effectively deflects demands for more radical change (Hajer, 1995, 1996; Levy, 1997). It is in the traditional interests of corporations to spend considerable sums on environmental management or social philanthropy as long as they retain the power to shape 'the meaning of greening' to their own interests (Levy, 1997:136). The assumption is thus promulgated that environmental management can be 'left to the corporate managers' (Levy, op. cit., p. 138), since corporations possess superior technical, financial and organisational resources to solve environmental problems (Shrivastava, 1995a). Schmidheiny (1992a) claims that business' large technological and productive capacity means that any progress towards sustainable development *requires* its 'active leadership' (Schmidheiny, 1992a:9). However, for business, as the world's 'most powerful mechanism' to become a real force in reversing global environmental and social degradation (Hawken, 1993), it must itself undergo a major transformation, as must the systems and structures which legitimate its asymmetrical power relations. That is not a scenario that can be envisaged in the short term: it challenges the hegemonic coalition of business, government, professions and intellectual élites (Levy, 1997), calling for a level of discursivity that may question their power. The unearthing and examination of corporate capital's ubiquitous control, allied to its failure to produce 'the good life', explains the turn some management theorists are making to social science frameworks, and particularly to Critical Theory, as alternative ways to theorise traditional management theory paradigms. This attempt to provide a 'better, more moral, historical dialogue' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000:15) is explored in the next section.

4.3 Traditional Management in Critical Perspective

> It is one of my targets to show people that a lot of things that are a part of their landscape – that people think are universal – are the results of some very precise historical changes. All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence. They show the arbitrariness of human institutions and show which space of freedom we can still enjoy and how many changes can still be made.
>
> *Technologies of the Self*, Foucault, 1988.

The critical re-theorisation of management that deconstructs the traditional paradigm presents a powerful critique of this supposedly 'neutral technology'. It identifies the growing crisis at the heart of the modernist discourse based in instrumental rationality.[115] It questions the moral commitments and consequences of that paradigm; and investigates themes of exploitation, repression, unfairness, asymmetrical power relations, distorted communication and false consciousness (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). The focus on the constructed nature of people and reality and the importance of language as part of the process of construction and control are central to the critique, although these theorists argue against grand narratives, or utopias. From a Foucauldian perspective, they seek to unearth the constraints on social actor efficacy – on 'progressive agency' – that are imposed by domination (Deetz, 1998). The power/knowledge connection of the 'expertise' central to these systems of domination is exposed and attempts made to empower silenced or marginalised voices. This critical theory of management demonstrates how workplaces produce a 'dominant logic' of material and symbolic formations which constitute a discursive formation that gives 'meaning' to the world, organises social institutions and processes, and then 'naturalizes' these to become taken-for-granted (Deetz, 1998:159). The 'change' programmes referred to in the previous section, as well as programmes for 'greening' the organisation, have fitted seamlessly into the dominant discursive formation, even constituting good 'business opportunities'. These purportedly 'radical and revolutionary' approaches have been basically preoccupied with preserving the status quo. Though dressed in the rhetoric of innovation and liberation, they fail or refuse to question the centrality of basic

[115] See, for example, Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Frost, 1980; Fischer and Sirianni, 1984; Alvesson and Willmott, 1996; Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Townley, 1993, 1998; Deetz, 1998; Findlay and Newton, 1998; Jackson and Carter, 1998; McKinlay and Starkey, 1998.

conceptions of the dominant model, such as profitable growth and managerial rule (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996).

This is witnessed in the 'industry' of sustainable development that now promotes the 'business case' for sustainable development, but without impacting on the dominant logic of organisations. Corporate discursive formations around sustainable development, whether through rhetoric and practice or through 'key silences', represent ways in which 'meaning' is created. This formation fails to connect significantly with broader social problems or to problematise management's central role in producing these. As is argued in this chapter, the 'business case' for sustainable development, rather than challenging meaning, institutions and processes, emanates from the same dominant logic of discursive formations of management which are now accommodating the concept. At the same time, these formations do not necessarily go unchallenged (Foucault, 1988): they present sites that are unstable and subject to struggle and contestation, a concept that is discussed in Chapter Five.

The fundamental question posed by Critical Theory begins with the defensibility and sustainability of a wasteful and divisive economy (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:2). The narrow, instrumental conception of reason that has imbued management theory must be replaced by a broader, critical appreciation of the emancipatory power of reason (Alvesson and Willmott, op. cit., p. 3), and the realisation that traditional 'solutions' to problems have often exacerbated matters. The 'rational' business case that ignores environmental and social 'externalities' and views sustainable development as lacking 'rigour' or 'rationality' is, itself, 'ir-rational' (Levy, 2002, personal communication). Critical theorists of the management paradigm start from the premise that the construct of management is a social and organisational activity, eschewing the 'engineering' metaphor frequently employed for the management process. Management 'is a medium and outcome of *a complex field of politico-economic, cultural and moral relations*' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:4, emphasis added). Hence the myth of 'scientific', 'objective', even 'value-free' management, devoid of subjectivity and politics, has to be problematised to unearth the process of 'mystification' integral to the colonising power of management practice. This critique applies as much to the 'soft' as the 'hard' specialisms in management: they all serve to perpetuate the 'conventional wisdom' and rely on the illusion of

manufactured neutrality (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996: 11). This 'sanitised' picture of management - distanced from the structures of power and interest that originally fashioned its emergence and development (Willmott, 1994a) - is deconstructed to reveal the dominant interests of a distinct and privileged managerial group, responsible to owners, not to employees or consumers. This basic condition of management is increasingly re-cast in terms of 'stakeholder' theory in an attempt to present management in a more positive light: although, tellingly, corporations often place emphasis upon stakeholder *management*, indicating accommodation of stakeholders to their own ideology rather than releasing the power of stakeholder discourse to bring about emancipation (Levy, 1997). Critical Theory challenges the legitimacy of this power of oppressive institutions and practices, seeking, instead, to develop the human potential for emancipation from 'false consciousness'[116] and the ability to recognise oppressive practices, which would be the authentic goal of stakeholder engagement. While the business literature on *stakeholder theory* generally perceives the 'management' of stakeholders as the rightful prerogative of business managers, it is constructed through Critical Theory as a concept that fosters autonomy, responsibility and the capacity to make informed choices that recognise inequality of wealth, power and knowledge (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:13). The ideology of individualism at the base of the mechanistic management paradigm opposes such autonomy and democracy: the 'authority' that is ascribed to managers serves to legitimate workers and other stakeholders being treated as 'objects', largely excluded from decision-making processes (Steffy and Grimes, 1992).

Much has been written in recent years about 'best management practice', but it has rested on technically rational means of maintaining profitable growth and the politics of production. From a Critical Theory perspective, 'best' management practice would be evaluated in terms of what it contributes to realising the progressive objectives of autonomy, responsibility, democracy and ecologically sustainable development (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:18). This perspective does not envisage utopian projects or the total abolition of hierarchy; again, organisations are perceived as 'sites of political contest' where distortion of communication and repressive and

[116] The term, 'false consciousness', is used with some circumspection, since the dissertation does not set out to make a case for 'true consciousness'.

asymmetrical relations of power are *gradually reduced* (Alvesson and Willmott, op. cit., p.18). The democratisation of managerial activity, and the replacement of divisive work relationships with systems that are more collective and co-operative, might result in a model akin to Gates' 'ownership solution' (1998), which propounds a theory of the reinvention of capitalism based on new paradigms of property and ownership.[117] Such collective and co-operative relationships were envisioned by some actors in the empirical investigation (see Chapter Nine).

In summary, the 'critical' perspective focuses, not on the technical know-how of traditional management, but on the struggle to mobilise the emancipatory potential of human reason. First, the barriers to human co-operation and communication are to be exposed; myths of capitalism and management are to be brought to consciousness; and values that have been pushed aside as not contributing to economic growth are to be 're-valued' to unearth and reveal the commodification of everyday life (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:22). In Habermasian terms, 'values nurtured in the life-world are mobilised to problematise and transform aspects of a system that are sensed to pose an intolerable threat to a valued sense of self-identity' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:22). The relevance of this to the empirical investigation is keen. A goal of my research was to foster such problematisation and reflexivity through the empirical work conducted with groups and individuals as they deconstructed their own conceptions of sustainable development and those perpetuated in the workplace. Deetz observes that 'Workplace democracy is a moral political issue, not one of greater productivity and satisfaction ... *We know something of civic responsibilities, and we need to take them to work* ... The moral foundation for democracy is in the daily practices of communication ... The recovery of democracy must start in these practices,' (Deetz, 1992:350-1, emphasis added).[118] This forms a strand of my empirical inquiry into conceptions of sustainable development and how these have been formed. The position is adopted, despite the contestability of the concept, that a

[117] However, such proposals to 'recreate' capitalism have already become the target of a conservative backlash in New Zealand (Henderson/NZBR, 2001; and see Chapter Seven.)

[118] Counter-hegemonic views sometimes emerged in the empirical research inquiry when participants made conceptual links between their 'personal' values and beliefs – for example, their 'civic responsibilities' - and their role(s) in the workplace. (See Chapter Nine).

radical interpretation of sustainable development is profoundly based in the search for autonomy, emancipation, equity, power-sharing, and, ultimately, democracy.

The dominant images of management that Critical Theory draws attention to are in strong contestation with a radical interpretation of sustainable development. The next section postulates that 'eco-modernism', based on constructs such as environmental management and eco-efficiency, is a paradigm constructed precisely to tame the potential threat of sustainable development; and Chapter Five explores some of the ways in which business operates to 'sanitise' the concept. The subjects of my empirical work were largely managers from middle to senior levels: they could be seen as both the agents and targets of instrumental reason in the workplace (Jackall, 1988). The technicist conception of management places these subjects in a hierarchy of expertise and power relationships – generally with a façade of being *apolitical* – and helps to legitimate the managerial domination of which they are a part (Gowler and Legge, 1983:210). However, as we are increasingly witnessing, managers as well as employees are expendable; they are victims as well as agents of the prevailing technical rationality that inhibits critical reflection (Alvesson and Willmott (1996:36). As the empirical investigation demonstrates, managers, workers and even CEOs are dominated by organisations that are ideologically and institutionally impeded from adopting more ethically rational and morally defensible values and practices. The 'ideological' work that organisations do is 'constitutive' (Clegg, 1998, following Foucault). Relations of agency and structure constitute discursive formations, permitting agency to some but not to others, focusing on the constitution of only certain kinds of representation, and operating through 'discipline' (Foucault, 1977). It is important to examine ways in which the voices of managers and workers who are concerned about environmental or sustainable development issues can be legitimised and strengthened (Levy, 1997); and this became a focus of my empirical investigation.

Although the recent developments in critical management theory contribute to this research, it is emphasized that the perspective has not yet taken anything like full account of the issues of sustainable development for business and for managers. While problematising the management paradigm, these 'critical' and Critical Theorists do sometimes acknowledge issues of ecological sustainability, but their

task has not yet been to theorise sustainable development or the ways in which it is accommodated, silenced or 'hi-jacked' in business situations. Their own analysis is constrained by this gap in the discourse around sustainable development. Their limited range of cited 'leaders' is taken chiefly from the theorists of the 'eco-modernist' discourse for the greening of industry.[119] One question posed in my thesis that has not been fully addressed in the 'critical' management literature is whether the discourse of sustainable development itself might represent a 'domain of resistance' that can oppose processes that seek to appropriate the concept. The 'gap' in the 'green business' research that this identifies is teased out in Section 4.4 of this chapter.

4.4 'Green' Business Management - *'Political Sustainability'*?

This section examines the evolution of 'green' business management as 'political sustainability'. In exploring the position that much of the literature of the 'green business' school contributes to the eco-modernist paradigm and 'political sustainability' (Levy, 1997), my intention is not to invalidate that discourse, which may have constitutive elements not yet understood (Foucault, 1973; 1977; Hajer, 1995). Instead, I reflect on the fact that it has been constrained, and has thus far failed to address structural and institutional changes that must underpin the business shift to sustainable development. The concept of 'political sustainability' is useful in explaining and understanding how the threat posed to the dominant business coalitions by sustainable development results in its own accommodation. The 'green business' orthodoxy that has developed, particularly since the Brundtland Report in 1987, has promoted technical solutions that represent essential but insufficient practical and mechanical stages in moving towards sustainable development. They have been 'management' solutions to what is more than a management problem. Even those attempts that have been made to step outside the management

[119] As noted (Chapter One), Alvesson and Deetz (2000) speak of the importance of sustainable development in the re-theorisation of management, but cite only research from Stead and Stead (1992) and Shrivastava (1995b).

'techniques'[120] – for example, environmental research focusing on leadership, culture, stakeholder theory, values and even spiritual aspects of business – have generally failed to address the hegemony of the capitalist economic system from which the problems arise and the relationship between that and unsustainability. They have sought solutions from within the *maneggiare* paradigm. The discourse of 'environmental management' has thus functioned at an ideological level to 'legitimate' corporate management and stewardship of the environment (Levy, 1997) and to construct its own 'value-added' approach to sustainable development that deflects very little from the traditional theory of management.

In a technical age, we have been led to believe that science and technology will supply answers to all problems, and management theory has promoted that belief. We have not been equally prepared to understand that management 'solutions' also cause and exacerbate problems. There are many 'technical-fixes' that *do* conserve resources, render production cleaner, reduce pollution and make business 'efficient' in ways not previously taken into account, or possible. The literature addressing such solutions that emerged in the 1990s - accompanied by a similar emergence of 'expert' consultants to help industry implement solutions – suggested a degree of bandwagon-jumping, not to mention assiduous pursuit of the business goal of profit. The fact that most such 'experts' were theoretically and practically rooted in the dominant management paradigm also precluded their driving emancipatory change. The 'green business' literature, at academic and practitioner level, has contained a strong element of what Newton and Harte (1997) have characterised as 'evangelising', which has importance for my research. Much of the activity currently taking place in New Zealand emerges as the evangelising of 'experts' preaching 'energy efficiency', 'cleaner production', 'zero waste', and 'triple bottom line' reporting.[121] These projects have generally been promoted without a level of critique as to why these 'fixes' came to be required in the first place; or a recognition that those promoting them do not address the 'insufficiency' of such techniques or the

[120] Management techniques referred to include, for example, environmental management systems (EMS), total quality environmental management (TQEM), best available technology not entailing excessive costs (BATNEEC), Life Cycle Analysis (LCA), ISO 14001 standards, et al.

[121] The international focus on the triple bottom line is promoted by the UNEP-SustainAbility reporting programme and numerous publications, for example, Bennett and James, 1998; 1999.

real *scale* of the problem. They mostly fail to confront the causality of the dominant ideology: '[E]nvironmental auditing and other environmental practices do not question the dominant corporate paradigm' (Callenbach et al., 1993:6). The techniques advocated demonstrate the central role of science and expertise in traditional management. Nevertheless, 'green business' has been a necessary and important step: the trick – sometimes overlooked or ignored – is to strenuously avoid believing it is the answer; to subject this new orthodoxy to the same rigorous critique that is now being applied to the *maneggiare* paradigm; and to be alert to ways in which eco-modernism is becoming substituted for sustainable development. However, environmental management need not be 'greenwash' if it becomes constitutive in a broader debate over economic goals and organisational governance mechanisms (Levy, 1997). It might be possible to perceive it as 'an incitement to discourse' (Foucault, 1981:17), leading on to questions of 'why' it became necessary to create technical solutions which are mostly of a temporary nature. The debate now needed is how to use the 'extra time' they may buy to examine and solve the systemic problems at the base of the crisis.

4.4.1 Corporate Environmentalism: Constructing 'Eco-Modernism'

The major upsurge of environmental activism in the 1960s and 1970s initially had relatively little impact on business. Environmental accidents could be viewed as an ancillary aspect of business-as-usual - a nuisance, but something which operating staff could deal with. Companies rarely had permanent staff or a designated budget for dealing with environmental issues (Ehrenfeld, 1999). As was noted in Chapter Three, the business case at the Stockholm Conference in 1972 was not strongly presented, so disengaged was business from the full significance for them of the environmental problematic. This changed with the passing of stringent environmental legislation, particularly in the United States,[122] and firms began to

[122] A key event in shifting corporate attitudes towards a more strategic approach to environmental management was the passing of the US Superfund Law (1986). Companies became responsible for cleaning up their waste and pollution and costs of compliance rose sharply. In addition, the public outrage that erupted in response to a series of environmental disasters – sudden events like the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal (1984) or the grounding of the Exxon Valdez (1989), or long-drawn-out battles with bureaucracy and corporate power, like the history of Love Canal - meant that companies had to take account of their multiple audiences and develop relations with stakeholders beyond customers and shareholders.

establish new functions to comply with technical requirements and to buffer themselves against risk New routines were introduced into companies, but little change to organisational structure was effected (Ehrenfeld, 1999). These new environmental functions generally remained at the periphery of business. The 'compliance era' brought about the appointment of compliance staff with designated environmental responsibilities and new management techniques in order to avoid clashes with the law; but, by and large, the normative structures of business, those which maintain the hegemony of the core, remained unchanged (Ehrenfeld, 1999).

Nevertheless, with tougher compliance, the environment represented an institutionally threatening context, and a costly one. A positive (and 'positivist') 'strategic' side to environmental management evolved, and certain strategic advantages to good environmental performance were taken into consideration: better public relations, the positive political value of cleaner performance, and some bottom line impacts from reduced costs and savings – especially in environmental fines. However, 'environment' still represented a function of business which could be incorporated into the mechanical paradigm of business-as-usual, even though executive responsibility for environmental matters began to emerge and responsibility for environmental protection became more diffused throughout the company. Environmental managers found their responsibility for compliance with regulation extended to aspects of quality control and corporate strategy;[123] and public statements of commitment to the environment became rife (Ehrenfeld, 1999: 229). The steps taken were efficient and rational: but, in themselves, were unlikely to have a real impact on company attitudes, beliefs, the core technology of the company or its organisational shape. Basic corporate visions and norms largely remained untouched (Erhrenfeld, 1999).

This new era of corporate environmentalism ushered in the paradigm of 'eco-modernism', which was given fresh impetus by the Brundtland Report and the focus on 'sustainable' development built upon continuing growth. The critique of 'eco-

[123] Such diffusion of responsibilities also ensures that the 'environmental' function of managers does not become too powerful. One of the characteristics of the role of environmental managers unearthed in the empirical research was that they are kept too busy to become 'political'.

modernism' and its role in the corporate struggle to appropriate the sustainable development agenda is examined in Chapter Five.

4.4.2 The 'Green Business' Literature: *'Epistemological Deceit'* ?

The 'green business' literature that burgeoned in the 1980s and early 1990s reflects the constrained nature of the corporate shift to environmentalism. Theoretically, this literature might be construed as a 'pre-paradigmatic stage' of the emergence of a theory of 'business and sustainable development'. Some of it, in the early 1990s, succeeded changes that legislation had already forced upon companies, with the emphasis being upon showing industry how to meet legislative requirements. It reinforced company-led changes made to avoid the public spotlight or change public perceptions of company practice, while providing a buffer against the environmental costs of non-compliance. This resulted in a welter of industry 'case studies'.[124] In other instances, the tendency was for the literature to follow on the heels of industry- or NGO-led initiatives - such as the chemicals industry's Responsible Care programme (1985), or the Valdez Principles, (CERES, 1989) - as well as the planning for national and international environmental codes and standards.[125] It was largely a modernist literature that described processes and recipes for implementation.

The 'greening' of business that was promoted was not concerned with the problematisation of the concept of sustainable development and overlooked the key relationship with the internal contradictions within capitalist production and consumption. 'How to' texts covered almost everything except the regime of accumulation and its consequences. They mostly addressed mitigating activities.[126]

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[124] For example, the 3M Pollution Prevention Pays (PPP) programme became the focus of many case studies and an exemplar for industry.

[125] One example is the literature that emerged to help companies attain ISO14001 accreditation.

[126] The focus was on achieving environmental standards; life-cycle analysis; environmental management and business strategy; total quality environmental management (TQEM); the greening of industry; clean and competitive performance; environmental marketing; auditing; green accounting and moving beyond compliance (Koechlin and Müller, 1992; Peattie, 1992, 1995; Gilbert, 1993; Welford and Gouldson, 1993; Gilbert, 1993; Wheatley, 1993; Welford, 1995, 1996; 1997b; Groenewegen et al., 1996; Hutchinson and Hutchinson, 1996; Sadgrove, 1997; Howes et al. 1997, to mention but a few in a large canon; although a more critical perspective began to emerge – for example, Welford, 1997a; 1998).

The importance of the area and its increasing academic legitimacy was signalled in its inclusion in reputable academic journals as well as the appearance of new journals devoted to the new 'discipline'.[127] By and large, these texts and journals have focused on the technical practicalities and mechanisms of how companies could become more compliant, more competitive, more 'clean and green', and more *profitable.* I argue that such rhetoric and techniques have been readily accommodated by corporations and strongly promoted by their representatives in the form of industry professional organisations as an 'alternative' agenda to sustainable development. Corporate hegemony has not been slow to recognise the importance of accommodating the discourse to its own ends.

'Techno-fixes' on their own have had little impact on corporate norms, and the 'green' literature, like that of traditional management, has turned to broader issues of strategy, organisational culture, governance, leadership, culture, company values and ethics – although it is rare that the ideological context or structure of corporate norms is examined. The literature now addresses corporate responsibility in broader terms, including working in 'green teams' (although, as noted, this can become a mechanism of control); adopting new approaches to accounting that consider a 'green' bottom line (but this buys into the traditional accounting paradigm); developing new ways of reporting and evaluating the company's shift to sustainability (with the concomitant danger – expressed clearly in the empirical research carried out in New Zealand – that this amounts to little more than a PR strategy); forming new partnerships between companies and NGOs;[128] working with stakeholders (with the concomitant risk of 'capturing' stakeholders); and developing ethical investment strategies.[129] Despite such approaches signalling more significant

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[127] Articles began to appear in recognised journals such as the *Academy of Management Review* and *Long Range Planning*; and a new cadre of journals emerged, devoted to business and environment research: for example, *Business Strategy and the Environment*; *Eco-Management and Auditing* (now *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*); *Sustainable Development*; *Greener Management International* and the more political and dialectical *Organization and Environment*. Journals such as these have introduced a new focus on the nexus between business and sustainable development, and hold more potential for politicizing the debate.

[128] Such partnerships became formalized at the WSSD, 2002, in terms of 'Type One' (statutory) and 'Type Two' (voluntary) partnerships between government, NGOs and business (Chapter Three).

[129] See, for example, Moxen and Strachan, 1998; McIntosh, et al., 1998; Bennett and James, 1998, 1999; Murphy and Bendell, 1997; Hancock, 1999.

change for corporate policy and action, these texts tend to be based firmly in the management paradigm and to focus on what companies should *'do'*, rather than what they should *'be'*; nor do they provide any deconstruction of their origins and raison d'être. They have often been more intent on 'evangelising' than critiquing the fundamental ideological basis of organisations and their reliance upon power, domination and hegemony. They have mostly failed to critique the functioning of the capitalist economy which managers are in no position to relinquish, since they are also overwhelmingly embedded in the 'false consciousness' of the ideology of economic growth. Such texts have been characterised as promulgating 'epistemological deceit' (Newton and Harte, 1997).

Some literature has emerged that makes a more 'critical' contribution. This examines the structures within which corporations exercise domination. For example, it highlights the ways in which corporations 'rule the world' (Korten, 1995); 'hijack' environmentalism (Welford, 1997); or retain their power through 'global spin' (Beder, 1997). Some involved with corporate business have envisioned different ways of doing business (Elkington, 1994; 1997; 2001; Wheeler and Sillanpää, 1997; Gates, 1998); and business-as-*unusual* has been attempted by a self-nominated 'maverick' (Roddick, 2000; 2001). The ideas promoted by 'gurus' have been picked up by some corporations and strongly reinforced through the business research and literature. Entire academic conferences promote green solutions – mostly to other academics – without problematising the causes of issues. A process of legitimation emerges whereby business groups like the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) promote constructions such as 'eco-efficiency', creating a following from academics and resulting in new 'theories' of 'sustainable development'. Well-intentioned constructs such as the 'triple bottom line' become part of the process of appropriation because they fail to challenge the capitalist growth paradigm. Such rhetoric becomes assimilated into the symbolic and semiotic codes of business. The chilling thought occurs that those advocating for the environment have further empowered a more sophisticated – albeit 'greener' – business-as-usual (Welford, 1998).

A more dialectical approach is adopted in some of the literature.[130] However, even as writers promote more 'systemic' approaches, they can continue to subscribe to the eco-modernist paradigm. They present cases that rely on the advantages of reduced costs through eco-efficiency; capturing 'green' markets; gaining 'first-mover' advantage; and ensuring profitability and 'brand value'. They view corporations 'heroically' as 'the primary engines of development', capable of 'unleashing their vast potential to resolve ecological problems' (Shrivastava, 1995a:937). A critique of management theory that highlights its narrow and parochial approach that 'virtually excludes the environment' still presents the 'business case' for 'identifying important sources of competitive advantage' (Hart, 1995:986); while the promotion of sustainable development as a 'strategic corporate priority' (Hart, 1998) fails to confront issues of power which threaten to accommodate the concept to the business model: sustainable development becomes a construct to reinforce corporate power.

More broadly conceptual frameworks have recently been developed that call for the employment of a 'critical' theory to shunt research on from positivist, apolitical or 'neutral' orientations to a change-agent role and away from the endless reinforcement of eco-efficiency within existing structures (Welford, 1998). Issues of economic globalisation and ecological sustainability, and the dichotomy between them, have been addressed (Roome, 1998). Nevertheless, it has largely fallen to theorists outside the green business paradigm to address key 'silences' in its literature. These include the effects of labour market restructuring in the pursuit of profit and the resultant unemployment and under-employment that signify an internal contradiction of capitalist production; the ensuing lower level of aggregate demand that threatens to cut corporate profitability and thereby the capacity to invest in environmentally sustainable technologies (Hudson and Weaver, 1997); and the impacts on people and nature that make a nonsense of the 'triple bottom line'. This literature, largely from neo-Marxism and the social sciences, reveals that systemic and structural contradictions are legitimated by such silences in the green business literature. The fact that 'all ecological projects (and arguments) are simultaneously political-economic projects (and arguments) and vice versa ... [they] are never

[130] For example, Smith, 1993; Hart, 1995; Shrivastava and Hart, 1995; Gladwin et al., 1995; Welford, 1997a; 1998.

socially neutral' (Harvey, 1993:22, cited in Hudson and Weaver, 1997) is ignored in the 'green' literature in the pursuit of so-called 'win-win' solutions which generally fail to challenge the agenda of capital and industrial production or to promote human agency (Hudson and Weaver, op. cit.).

4.5 Critical Theory Perspectives on Business and Sustainable Development

Recent contributions to the literature of business and sustainable development that are grounded in critical/Critical Theory problematise the issues from the perspective of this thesis and indicate some focal areas for the empirical research. The goal of this literature is not merely to coax business towards new levels of eco-efficiency using the carrot of increased growth and profitability: it is to seek empowerment, to strip away false consciousness, and to negate the appropriation of the agenda of sustainable development to the eco-modernist paradigm. It addresses the concern expressed in this thesis, that much of the 'green' business literature accedes to the hegemony of the prevailing paradigm; and it provides a critique of 'green evangelising' based on the assumption that organisations will change voluntarily if only shown how to effect 'eco-change' (Newton and Harte, 1997:75). It exposes an emerging consensus that coalesces around managerial prescriptions, the goal of 'greener' business for profit maximisation and the unchallenged ideology of economic growth (Newton and Harte, 1997:77). The claim that business is more likely and better able than government to foster environmentalism through voluntary initiatives is critiqued for what it is: a strategy to fend off stronger regulation. The faith in corporate heroes equipped to lead the revolution is challenged. The employment of green business strategies as a 'trajectory' to more 'discursive problematisation' of the environment, using the strategies as something like a Foucauldian 'incitement to discourse' (Foucault, 1981:17),[131] has also been dismissed as 'kitsch' (Newton and Harte, 1997:82). It is seen as representing a 'romantic' narrative, although it is one that Marcuse (1964) would have perceived as a 'totalising' narrative. The critical/Critical Theory perspective reveals the danger of

[131] While this basically describes my own strategy in using the national survey as a means of 'infiltration' or an 'incitement to discourse', I accept the point made by Newton and Harte, since this strategy, though successful, had to be supplemented by intensive and long-term partnerships with companies.

evangelistic literature clouding the need for more effective regulation, while blunting critical academic inquiry, and contributing to the 'epistemological deceit' integral to the 'greening of business' paradigm (Newton and Harte, 1997: 83). The green business contribution represents the corporate strategy literature, re-written in environmental terms (largely by academics, possibly for profit and '*academic "brand" value*'), evoking the language of corporate culturalism and excellence, while eschewing critical analysis or problematisation of the process.[132]

The result is that an environmental problematic that threatens the dominant 'production' hegemony is accommodated to the 'safe' production of 'greenness' and the construction of 'political sustainability' (Levy, 1997: 135). Corporations are encouraged to 'bolt on' the 'false consciousness' of a 'green tinge' (Smith, 1993:9). 'Environmental management', as discourse and practice, disguises problematic concerns about dominant corporate interests and the legitimacy of the economic system. While it may reduce the most flagrant abuses of the environment, it also acts at an ideological and symbolic level to legitimize corporate management as the *primary societal agent* for addressing environmental problems, this 'legitimacy' being based on the following central assumptions:

- That the environment can and should be managed;
- That corporate managers should do the managing;
- That environmental management is a win-win situation; and
- That traditional management functions and concepts are appropriate tools to use. (Levy, 1997:126).

It amounts to 'reformism' (Merchant, 1992) or 'reform environmentalism' (Egri and Pinfield, 1996) that fails to get to the root of the problem and which deflects the need for radical change. As 'political sustainability', it constructs an ideological response that accommodates the threat to hegemony while telling a reassuring alternative tale

[132] For example, it fails to contribute a critique of the duplicity of business environmental groups that promote the 'green' image while lobbying the World Trade Organisation for the sanctity of the free market (Newton and Harte, 1997:90). This was a theme raised by one of the managers in the empirical research (Chapter Seven), who noted that 'green' companies in New Zealand were still in opposition to government signing the Kyoto protocol.

of 'redemption and enlightenment' (Levy, 1997:135), providing a seductive tool for corporate PR strategies.

Also pertinent to my research is the critical examination that has taken place of how senior managers construct their 'green' roles within hegemonic institutions (Fineman, 1996; 1997). This research focuses on the tensions between private moral positions, enacted morality and the conventional morality disseminated by corporations (Fineman, 1997:31). It provided me with a model for one aspect of my research with the managerial focus group, since it throws light on aspects of self-identity construction that is one of the sub-themes of the empirical research.

4.6 Concluding Comments

There are a number of reasons for the radical discourse of sustainable development being under-developed in management theory and in the new 'green business' theory. Both neglect the effects of political economy and an anatomy of the power that operates in corporations. Both sets of literature adopt a position that is 'apolitical', or insufficiently political to problematise the ways in which external political leverage frames managerial rationalities, including the way sustainable development is or is not integrated into theory or practice. The 'green business' literature has relied strongly on messianic imperatives about the importance of environmental management as the key driver to change in industrial practices. It has helped to capture the concept of sustainable development at ideological and symbolic levels, to construct a 'value-added' version of sustainable development and to legitimate the primacy of corporate interests in the discourse. The emergence of a theory of business and sustainable development framed in Critical Theory signals a critique that takes into account the capitalist hegemony and the historically situated coalition between business, government and professional and intellectual élites. Applied to management theory and the concept of sustainable development it opens up a 'war of positions' that may allow counter-hegemonic forces to emerge – those societal, political, material and ideological forces needed to effect societal change. This new critique has helped to frame my empirical research and has indicated models that may be used as heuristics for that research. It contributes to the

theorisation of the purported appropriation of the sustainability agenda by business that is undertaken in Chapter Five; and the exploration of such appropriation in the New Zealand context that is part of the contribution of the empirical research.

Chapter Five

Business and Sustainable Development

> Among the barriers we face to accomplishing this transformation is the powerful coalition of interests aligned behind an institutional agenda that is taking us in a quite different direction. These are the corporate interests that benefit when societies make the pursuit of economic growth the organizing principle of public policy.
>
> David Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World,* 1995.

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I first return to the epistemological framework to re-examine an important contradiction identified within the contestation of sustainable development which forecast the likelihood of appropriation. I tease out two opposing but not unlinked perspectives that may both be seen as catalysts for appropriation, although in different ways. I then examine the evidence of business' overt and covert attempts to subvert the agenda of sustainable development, particularly through the establishment of 'professional' and 'front' groups. These strategies purportedly seek to foster the business transition to sustainable development, but are revealed as subverting and neutralising the radical aspects of the discourse to a tamer narrative of eco-efficiency. The act of appropriation is exposed through the language and the 'silences' of the business rhetoric, and through 'distorted' communication employing the symbolic and semiotic codes of the capitalist discourse. Although it is not easy to envision what would characterise a 'sustainable' company, an examination is made of what basic principles might be called for and the 'worldview' that would inform the construct. These are compared with the 'eco-modernist' discourse that business currently promotes as an alternative agenda of business-as-usual.

The examination of the act of appropriation prepared the ground for the empirical inquiry carried out with companies. My work with managers in New Zealand took into account the likelihood of participants being conscious or unconscious agents in the act of appropriation. On the other hand, they might aspire to being part of the transition to more sustainable business, though wittingly or unwittingly caught up as agents in a process that would preclude it. The methodological approach constructed

for the empirical research therefore provided scope to introduce an element of 'social actor efficacy' by exploring 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988), where participants were encouraged to reflect on their own agency or lack of it within the organisation. While such reflection in itself was unlikely to effect change, it provided the possibility of raising conceptual understanding of the status quo.

5.2 Sustainable Development – Dichotomy and Appropriation

The problematic and contested nature of sustainable development discussed in Chapter Three is frequently advanced to explain business' general lack of engagement with the concept, a theme that also emerged in the empirical research. It is argued that the absence of a tight definition makes it difficult for business to understand; though, at the same time, the lack of specificity also offers scope to subvert the narrative. Within the many attempts to frame the construct there exists a very important paradox. Some view sustainable development as the progeny of the *maneggiare* paradigm[133] – the means by which corporates have appropriated the environmental agenda while focusing on growth. Others see the concept as possessing radical political power for change. It is argued here that both positions in that paradox provide business with the impetus to 'own' and 'appropriate' the sustainable development agenda, although for different reasons.

Chapter Three examined the discourse from neo-Marxian and Critical Theory perspectives, where sustainable development is perceived as having radical potential to challenge the ideology of capitalism through its agenda of equity, democracy and futurity: its own ideological position. This threatens the power and domination exercised by capitalist institutions, and the hegemony and alleged 'false consciousness' that they perpetuate. It envisions goals of emancipation, more equitable redistribution of resources and power-sharing. It presupposes such fundamental change to the capitalist political economy and the purpose, nature and organisation of corporations that an escalation of corporate resistance might be anticipated. Even a level of 'incomprehension' as to *why* such a paradigm shift should be envisioned could be expected, partly because of lacunae in the education

[133] See perspectives from Sunderlin (1995) and Escobar (1996) in Chapter Three.

of managers (see Chapter Four); but also because corporate hegemony produces in business protagonists a genuine belief that the current market arrangements promise the best route to the betterment of the planet and mankind (see, for example, Schmidheiny, 1992a). This goes some way towards explaining the absence of any authentic engagement with the radical agenda of the sustainable development discourse: any threat to the dominant power and hegemony, or suggestion of fundamental change to the political economy and the institutions that constitute and support it, will not be countenanced. Such threats may be ridiculed, ignored, or – more powerfully – appropriated. This 'radical' perspective on the potential emancipatory power of sustainable development to change the historical narrative opposes the counterview already alluded to. One position views sustainable development as no more than an extension of the capitalist political economy, while the other is based on the perceived radical potential of the concept. The following section examines the view that sustainable development is an extension of the capitalist paradigm.

5.2.1 Sustainable Development and the Narrative of Management

The '*maneggiare*' paradigm for nature commenced well before the Brundtland Report, or the appropriation of nature by corporate hegemony, with the reframing of nature as 'environment' (Hays, 1979, cited in Hajer, 1996). 'Apostles of efficiency' refashioned the concepts of 'wilderness' and 'nature' with techniques of 'efficient resource management'. They replaced the old story lines of corporate environmental damage with schemes for 'scientific resource management'. A narrative emerged that promoted the technocratic call for experts, administrators and politicians to govern the discourse (Hajer, 1996:247). This resulted in 'discourse coalitions' based on shared interests, akin to the Habermasian 'technocratic élite'; it represented the extended colonisation of nature. One outcome has been the discourse of 'ecological modernisation' which business has readily joined. At the heart of this discourse is the assumption that economic growth and the resolution of ecological problems can be reconciled: environmental problems are no more than matters of 'inefficiency' and 'cleaner production'. This supports what Schumpeter identified as 'the fundamental impulse that sets and keeps the capitalist engine in motion' (Schumpeter, 1961, cited

in Hajer, 1996). Ecological modernisation changes the conditions of 'discourse structuration' in government and industry circles, substituting eco-modernist story lines to guide administration and decision-making. This has resulted in 'discourse institutionalisation', a *non-discursive* narrative resulting in what has been termed 'mercantilism with a green twist' and 'state managerialism' (Hajer, 1996:250).

This institutionalisation of nature resulted in a '*marketplace*' of communication on the environment (Eder 1996b) and the appropriation of the old ethic of environmentalism, with its earlier focus on liberalism, socialism and conservation. It led, not to more democracy, but a new technocracy in the name of 'environmental protection'; and made it almost inevitable that business would emerge as the ultimate manager. The threat of reduced discursivity and the concomitant reduction in democracy was important to my research, where institutional as well as corporate factors are critiqued and where a 'deficit of democracy' emerges as a theme. For some critics,[134] the Brundtland Report represented the 'formalisation' of the role of ecological modernisation in cultural politics, and a powerful critique of the concept of 'sustainable development' followed its publication. The Report was seen as effectively leaving the way open for business-as-usual. The fear that 'sustainable development' had bought into the management paradigm (Redclift, 1996), that it reconciled 'two old enemies' (Redclift, 1987), and that environmentalists themselves, by buying into 'environmental management', had contributed to the capture of the concept (Sachs, 1993), formed an important argument in the ensuing contestation. Sustainable development was seen as providing 'political cover' for business-as-usual (Paehlke, 1999).

This 'management regime' of sustainable development effectively underpins the new processes of capitalism that aim to 'conserve' nature (Escobar, 1996). Both represent a 'conservation' ethic driven by utilitarian values and the desire for 'sustainable management of *capitalised* nature' (Escobar, op. cit., p. 47, emphasis added). This appropriation of 'nature' signals a deeper cultural domination than did the more obviously illegitimate 'plunder' phase of corporate capitalism. The Brundtland Report, with its own 'management' agenda, was feared to have increased the

[134] See, for example, Sachs, 1991; Rich, 1994.

possibility of the domination of nature, rather than challenging the corporate capitalist system. The uneasy assumption made in the Report that sustainable development can *reconcile* economic growth and preservation of the environment covertly signified, for some, that any adjustment to the workings of the *market system* itself need not take place. Critics of the Report maintained that it was nature that would be *reinvented*, not capitalism. The sustainable development discourse became subsumed in narratives of 'planning' and 'management' whereby the dominant hegemony gained and retained power. It represented 'growth without limits' (Sachs, 1988), and 'the symbolic death of nature' (Escobar, 1996), where nature is reinscribed into the law of 'value' from that of 'use'.

This perspective on the historical origins of sustainable development and the role for which it was constructed throws a particular light on industry's purported 'capture' of the discourse. From this perspective, the 'capture' took place even before the Brundtland Report or UNCED 1992: 'sustainable development' is seen as being spawned by the social relations of capital. It represents another part of the overall attempt to re-signify nature, resources, the Earth and human life (Escobar, 1996:59), and to turn these into Marx's 'second nature' in the interests of the conditions of production. It implies that there has actually been no 'appropriation' of the concept: it has grown naturally out of the armoury whereby capitalism sustains and continually reinvents itself. Its position is thus located at the reductionist/technocentric/weak pole of the sustainable development heuristic applied in my research. It reflects 'weak' sustainability as opposed to eco-justice; functional, mainstream positions rather than political progressiveness; a focus on sustainable 'growth'; and a narrative of management which threatens to dominate the discourse of sustainable development and democracy. This genesis of sustainable development contextualises the management narratives of eco-modernism and 'political sustainability'.

5.2.2 Sustainable Development and Democracy: *'A site of political contest'.*

The discourse of sustainable development that provides a more emancipatory vision presents a position which is not totally out of kilter with the critique outlined in

Section 5.2.1, since it is also in opposition to the dominant paradigm. It represents no complete or utopian alternative; and it attributes the causes of *un*sustainable development to the same sources. I have termed it 'the discourse of sustainable development and democracy', which encapsulates the ultimate goal of the radical position. It is a discourse that has been examined from different perspectives – those of the development literature, Critical Theory, Marxian theory and eco-socialism; and that examination from Chapters Two and Three will be drawn upon in this section.

From a 'democratic' perspective, sustainable development is understood as *a guide for human behaviour* rather than for management practices, an 'unapologetically normative' concept (Redclift, 1991:37) that presents a social goal, requiring answers to 'embarrassing questions' that address power, exploitation and inequitable consumption. It is a political concept, although generated largely through the power of international but Northern-led organisations (Redclift, op. cit.); while the fact that it has formed part of the 'management narrative' makes it vulnerable to capture (Escobar, 1996). The discourse is socially constructed, as well as contested and problematical (Redclift, 1999), representing an 'essentially political project' with radical intent, calling for shifts in human behaviour which will include the redefinition of the roles of public, private and political institutions (Munton, 1996). The concept is seen not only as having political power but comprising an energising force in its own right (O'Connor, 1994). Such perceptions of the 'innate power' of the construct help to explain the determination of corporations to find legitimation for an alternative paradigm of 'greened growth', rather than accede to the level of ideological and institutional change that the radical perspective signals.

The degree of contestation surrounding the concept may actually help to obscure or dissipate this potential radical power. However, the constant core of meaning represents a 'site of political contest', akin to Gramsci's 'war of positions' (Gramsci, 1988); and Lash et al. (1996) invest sustainable development with the power to contest the dominant ideology. Its core themes of social equity, global justice and basic human rights present a constructivist discourse on human relations, culture and politics, despite the Northern emphasis upon 'management' through technological expertise. While rooted in the modernist economic paradigm (Satterthwaite, 1996),

there is a consensus that, if freed from such domination, sustainable development might provide a new meta-theory of environmental justice, equity and ecological rationality (O'Connor, 1998). As noted in Chapter One, key features of this would be an emancipatory discourse of 'truth-making' (Gerber, 1997), democratic participation (Jacobs, 1991) and discursive democracy (Dryzek, 2000). These radical themes raise questions about the exercise of power and domination, about management, administrative systems, 'eco-cracy', and about democracy. They challenge the relationships between power and knowledge and the epistemological hegemony that is at the base of institutional hegemony (Redclift, 1991). Such a discourse of democracy and emancipation threatens the position considered in the previous section by envisioning sustainable development as a driver toward a democratic form of society which would profoundly challenge capitalism as it now exists. This also provides ample insight into the reasons why business would be anxious to appropriate such a change-agent concept and strive to convert it into a narrative it can own and dilute, re-presenting its own version as the 'official' discourse of sustainable development.

In the examination that follows of business' relationship with the concept, both aspects of the dichotomy outlined above will be considered. What has been described as 'weak' sustainability[135] fits the view of sustainable development as having arisen from the ideology of the capitalist economy, reinforcing rather than challenging that paradigm, having been appropriated at its genesis. The 'strong' conception of sustainability fits the radical role that has been described, and is the interpretation of the concept that is likely to be challenged, overtly or covertly, by the dominant ideology. It is in the interests of business to ignore, silence or subvert the 'strong' agenda in order to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, if sustainable development were a 'catch-all' excuse for business-as-usual to continue in a 'green' disguise, a mere off-shoot of capitalist managerialism, then it might be argued that the 'radical' construction is appropriating the capitalist/management agenda. In terms of appropriation, this raises the interesting question of who has captured whose

[135] See, for example, O'Riordan (1981; 1988); Daly and Cobb, 1989; Turner (1993); and Bebbington and Thomson (1996).

agenda in a discursive process that is complex, contested, constitutive and highly political.

5.2.3 Managerial Support for Sustainable Development

In preparation for the ensuing examination of the corporate appropriation of the sustainable development agenda, one other aspect is briefly discussed. If it is considered against the three classical sociological perspectives – the class, managerialist and pluralist traditions – it can be seen that the concept is ideologically located in the 'managerial' arena. Predictably, then, it is largely from the class and pluralist traditions that opposition to the concept has arisen (Sunderlin, 1995). The battle for sustainable development is grounded in the 'ideological suppositions and interests' of competing factions (Redclift, 1991), not in the alleged *semantic confusion* that has occupied so much of the rhetoric. Consequently, as discussed, it can be viewed as an essentially managerial and reformist construct fitting the paradigm of bureaucratisation, centralised management, large-scale planning and technical sophistication. Nevertheless, two strands may be perceived within this managerial perspective: the *political/progressive* and the *functional/mainstream* positions. These reflect the contradiction around sustainable development and the means of its capture. The political/progressive stance is closer to that of the 'class' paradigm which has largely opposed sustainable development, seeing growth as the 'problem' and calling for radical change. The functional/mainstream position is closer to the pluralist perspective which sees growth as the 'solution' to environmental and social problems. If managerialism is the 'home base' of the sustainable development concept (Sunderlin, 1995; Escobar, 1996), then it can be seen that corporate environmentalism fits tightly within the functional/mainstream pole of the continuum. Economic growth is seen as a solution, not a problem in its own right; and the concept of sustainable development becomes practically synonymous with that of 'sustainable growth'. This also underlines that 'corporate sustainable development' is located at the 'weak' end of the 'weak-strong' continuum, a position that I scope out in Section 5.3.1.

The 'managerial support' for sustainable development is witnessed in the dominant role business has played in the formal international debates and the way these fora

have been managed, and is the basis for the viewpoint propounded by business professional or front groups. The constructions that have emerged from these groups, the nature of the rhetoric and imagery employed, and particularly their 'significant silences', re-scope the conceptual space of sustainable development. The means of that more complete appropriation are considered in the following section.

5.3 Executive Cliques and the International Agenda on Sustainable Development

> [The corporations'] ... tremendous financial resources, the diversity of their interests, the squads of talented professionals – all these assets and some others are now relentlessly focused on the politics of governing ... This new institutional reality is the centrepiece in the breakdown of contemporary democracy. Corporations exist to pursue their own profit-maximisation, not the collective aspiration of society. They are commanded by a hierarchy of managers, not by democratic deliberation.
>
> William Greider, *Who Will Tell the People?* 1992.

The managerialist conception of sustainable development explains the ease with which the corporate world has purged the radical understanding of the concept. The managerial aspects of the concept itself have supported the corporate eco-modernist agenda, militating against a radical view to shore up a development paradigm of deregulated trade and investment, boundless faith in technology and an obsession with growth predicated on greater productivity and competitiveness. Sustainable development has become a means of enhancing corporate interests, while critical social and ethical aspects of the construct are silenced (although lip-service is paid to both). This reminds us that the roots of knowledge, including the *suppression* of knowledge, rest in power relations (Foucault, 1977). The 'representational power' of corporations is effectively exercised through 'executive cliques', such as the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and the WBCSD (Mayhew, 1997). UNCED (1992) provided a model of how world business organisations can mobilise at high strategic level and employ their 'representational power' to defend their privileged position. Corporate influence at UNCED was used to promote sustainable development as fitting the corporate-friendly, liberal productivist development paradigm (Mayhew, 1997:70). The ICC attempted to set in place the fallacy that 'sustainable development and transnational corporate capitalism *are one and the same*' (Mayhew, 1997:69, emphasis added). It staked an early claim to influencing

the UNCED agenda, thus revealing how well some aspects of the Brundtland Report had been understood in terms of economic growth, while doing little to promote its equity agenda - the ICC was in favour of the Brundtland Report's 'emphasis on the importance of economic growth providing that growth is sustainable' (ICC, 1992). In 1991, in time for UNCED, the ICC produced its 'Business Charter for Sustainable Development' (Appendix 1), comprising a set of 16 voluntary 'Principles for Environmental Management' in which the term 'sustainable development' graced only the title and the first principle. Post-UNCED, the ICC established the World Industry Council on the Environment (WICE) as the 'advocate of business interests on environmental questions', its task being to analyse *the likely effects of government policy and environmental legislation* on 'corporate interests' and to provide a 'corporate forum' for CEOs. Laissez-faire objectives were promoted, a chief one being 'to influence the direction of policy-making towards cost-effective and '*sound-science'* based policies' (ICC, 1994). This objective of questioning the principles of ecological sustainability on the grounds of 'sound science' also occupies a place in the discourse in New Zealand, as the analysis of the empirical evidence reveals. Most indicatively, in 1993, the ICC reported its success in promulgating 'the shelving of the UN's draft Code of Conduct on Transnational Corporations' and the 'downgrading' of the UN's Centre on TNCs (Mayhew, 1997:71).[136] [137] This profound influence over the emerging agenda of sustainable development pointed to a deeper danger – one that, more than a decade after UNCED, and following the WSSD, seems to have materialised in many fora – that interpretations of sustainable development will become framed by an eco-modernist discourse and legitimized according to its implications for the generation of corporate profit (Mayhew, 1997:73).

[136] This power exercised over the UN Centre and the Code of Conduct was still a matter of strong contention in the discourse of NGOs and other groups leading up to the WSSD (See Chapter Three).

[137] The ICC Business Briefs for UNCED also argued for greater 'technocracy', ignoring the key social and ethical issues of sustainable development, and framing environmental issues so that it appeared that corporate expertise would provide their solution. Confidential reports produced by the ICC in 1992 exposed the organisation's pressure on the Swedish government to withdraw its suggested clause for Agenda 21 calling for TNCs to internalise environmental costs in their accounting and reporting procedures; and their lobbying to ensure the Climate Change Convention did not set mandatory targets for greenhouse gas emissions (Mayhew, 1997).

The operation of corporate power and hegemony was also apparent in the privileged role the newly formed Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD) enjoyed at UNCED[138] and the assurance it also engineered that the Summit agenda would not address the business of TNCs and their responsibility for unsustainable development. The BCSD's major tools of persuasion were Schmidheiny's *'Changing Course'* (1992a) and a comprehensive PR strategy including a series of privileged 'briefings' to business and political leaders at UNCED (Schmidheiny, 1991a; 1991b; 1992b). Comments such as the following indicate, not only the determination, but the confidence with which the BCSD proposal to take control of the sustainable development agenda was conceived:

> 'The BCSD is helping the business community *to set its own agenda* on the issue of sustainable development [and] *convincing governments and societies* that the private sector can be their principal ally in future ... The Council is also a key actor in describing *what business and industry would like to see incorporated* within Agenda 21 ...'
>
> Maurice Strong, BCSD, (1991a, emphasis added).

The BCSD definition of sustainable development, although framed to suit its own ends, was more seductive than that of the ICC, appearing to be open to the radical change that sustainable development implies (Mayhew, 1997:75).[139] For example, the call for a *'revolutionary appraisal'* of the activities of the business and industry community (BCSD, 1991b) and '[a] change towards sustainable forms of progress ... from one based on consumption to one based on conservation' imply a recognition of the need to restrict growth, but are nevertheless in contention with other positions voiced by the BCSD which articulate a corporate environmentalist world-view almost exactly corresponding to the tenets of the ICC.[140] The seemingly

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[138] The BCSD was established at the invitation of Maurice Strong, Secretary to UNCED, and a wealthy businessman.

[139] The fact that the BCSD initially appeared to have a more 'radical' agenda possibly reflected the involvement of long-term environmentalist, Lloyd Timberlake, in the Council's genesis and programme (Timberlake, personal communication, 1994).

[140] The concept of sustainable development is defined as: *'combining the objectives of growth with environmental protection for a better future'*; (BCSD, undated, in Mayhew, 1997); and it is *'development, growth and the creation of economic surpluses'* that are perceived as the way to deal with poverty and pollution (Schmidheiny, 1991a, emphasis added).

'innovative', even 'radical', approach to micro-management issues introduces rhetoric that has since become commonplace in the eco-modernist agenda:

> 'sustainable development means new relationships between corporations and their *stakeholders*, such as employees and citizens, built on the principles of *transparency* and *accountability* and requires new *indicators* of corporate performance well beyond the traditional bottom line.'
>
> (Faulkner, BCSD, 1992, emphasis added).

No real devolution of power is indicated, and sustainable development promises to become another mode whereby the corporate world expands its remit and control, leading to the desired goals of 'public *acceptance* of corporate activity' and *'self-regulation* rather than legislation' (Schmidheiny, 1992a:88, emphasis added).

The amalgamation of the BCSD and WICE in January 1995 to form the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) was designated as being formed to 'give business leaders a powerful new voice on sustainable development issues' (WICE, 1994). The new Council combined a mixture of the 'defensiveness' of the ICC with the 'more insidious proactivity' of the BCSD (Mayhew, 1997:78). Again, the language used is indicative, and prepares the way for the examination in Chapters Seven and Eight of the rhetoric and role of the New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development (NZBCSD). The WBCSD's Mission statement defined its role as being to 'promote the attainment of *eco-efficiency'* (a term coined by the BCSD), in keeping with the eco-modernism of the ICC's Business Charter. This insistence on the primacy of economic growth, binding sustainable development to liberal-productivist ends, sets out to influence public policy-making and to preserve the macro-conditions for business-as-usual. Its chief goal is to promote voluntary measures over legislation. The aim is to turn sustainable development into a 'business opportunity'.

This brief account of how business professional groups frame their narrative of sustainable development provides an indication of how the 'managerial' and 'radical' perspectives discussed in 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 both impact on that narrative. The presentation of sustainable development as an extension of 'corporate business as usual' arises 'naturally' from the perspective that the concept was coined to secure continuing capitalist control over nature and people within a paradigm of economic

growth. Yet the 'special pleading' from these groups and their exercise of corporate power over the main political fora also provide an indication of their acute awareness of the radical agenda and their determination to fight it. Nowhere is this more potent than in the attempts to capture the rhetoric of sustainable development and conflate it with their own; and some of the ways in which this is done are discussed in the following section.

5.3.1 The Rhetoric of Eco-Modernism

In the decade between UNCED and the WSSD, business became increasingly involved in driving the environmental agenda through the lobbying of front groups. The nature of corporate environmentalism and its ideological base in 'eco-modernism' (Hajer, 1995; Welford, 1997) signifies industry's reluctance to divorce itself from the systems which perpetrated the environmental crisis. Hence, a discourse on environment has been constructed that fits the modernist aims and objectives of business, with its capitalist traditions and ethos of management. This has been termed 'a conjuring trick or juggling act' (Welford, 1997:26), where seeing is believing unless we examine the apparatus and methods of the 'act'. Eco-modernism is seen as adopting 'eco-efficiency' as its major tool in order to dissipate the force of the sustainable development debate – it veers the discourse off at a tangent, insinuating its own rhetoric as part of the appropriation. The rhetoric employed was typified within the Declaration of the BCSD:

> 'Economic growth in all parts of the world is essential to improve *the livelihoods of the poor*, to *sustain growing populations*, and eventually to stabilise population levels. New technologies will be needed to *permit growth* while using energy and other resources more *efficiently* and producing *less pollution.*
>
> *Open and competitive markets*, both within and between nations, foster *innovation and efficiency* and provide opportunities *for all to improve their living conditions.* But such markets must give the right signals; the prices of goods and services must increasingly recognise and reflect the *environmental costs* of their production, use, recycling and disposal. This is fundamental, and is best achieved by a synthesis of *economic instruments* designed to correct distortions and encourage *innovation* and *continuous improvement*, *regulatory standards* to direct performance, and *voluntary initiatives* by the private sector.' (Schmidheiny, 1992a, emphasis added).

This sounds reasonable, caring and thoughtful. It employs a language which appears to encapsulate the concerns of sustainable development – it cares about 'the livelihoods of the poor', the sustainability of 'growing populations', efficient use of energy and reduction of pollution, recycling and disposal. But it hinges upon business maintaining hegemonic power and continuing its normal procedures. Even some introduction of economic instruments and regulatory standards will be tolerated as long as these are 'synthesised' with voluntary initiatives from business: that is, government is to co-operate with dominant corporate interests. There is no thought of 'futurity' to be gleaned from the rhetoric beyond the perpetuation of business, nor of any change to those institutional arrangements which contribute to poverty, over-population and pollution. The latter problems are to be 'managed', rather than changing their institutional drivers. It is the continuation of the wider interests of bigger and more successful business that is sought. This includes spelling out the role of government, focusing on technology and management and the maintenance of productivity, and homing in on *cleaner production* as an alternative to sustainable development:

> 'Companies now have to work with governments to spread environmentally efficient production processes throughout the global business community ... this will require significant technological, managerial, and organizational changes, new investments, and new product lines ... it will be increasingly in a company's own interests to develop cleaner products and processes.'
> (Schmidheiny, 1992a:99).

There is no threat here to the 'irrationality' of positivism, rationality and the maintenance of current patterns of wealth distribution. The ill-defined tool of eco-efficiency – *'the ratio of resource inputs and waste outputs to final product'* (Schmidheiny, 1992a:98) – works on the principle of trade-off, with business-as-usual making some concessions to the environment. Eco-efficiency is firmly located at the *weak* or *shallow* end of the environmental debate, relying upon technical fixes rather than presaging more profound change. Welford characterises this as the world of 'industrial imperialism' (1997:30): in its colonisation of yet another part of the life-world, business has attempted to subvert the sustainable development agenda and its implications for radical change and democracy. A key way to appropriate a socially constructed term such as sustainable development is through language, conflating the languages of both discourses to create association between the concept

of sustainability and organisational practice (Jennings and Zandbergen, 1995; Livesey, 2001). For example, the rhetoric of eco-modernism is empty of the principles upon which this thesis is based. It fails to speak of the social and cultural issues that are central to sustainable development; it is silent on the impacts of the capitalist political economy - the ideology that the radical construct of sustainable development opposes – and on the modernism and managerialism central to business today. The capitalist hegemony driving the business agenda is not up for discussion: it is a 'silence' which is only revealed by the application of 'embarrassing questions' to unearth its origins (Foucault, 1980). There is little of vision – particularly of a future where power and wealth are differently distributed, where hegemony is overcome or false consciousness stripped away to facilitate emancipation; and no engagement with the radical issues of the sustainable development discourse. The eco-modernist discourse fits tightly with the functional/mainstream position of the managerialist roots of sustainable development (Sunderlin, 1995; Escobar, 1996). The rhetoric employed arises chiefly from environmental management practices and relies on a constrained vocabulary promoting business interests. The language is most consistently perpetrated by the executive cliques referred to earlier who largely control the business-environment discourse and develop the ideas and language which become the mainstays of their corporate members. These are assimilated at the broader levels of society, including policy-makers, often in the name of consensus building. 'Growth' and 'market share' remain sacred tenets.

The publications produced on behalf of business and its major front groups between UNCED and the WSSD reveal that 'eco-justice' issues are narrowed to managing poverty and pollution through economic growth. What remains prominent is faith in eco-efficiency and technology and the ability of business to manage the way out of the problematic, although the magnitude and scale of eco-efficiency gains that would really be necessary to 'fix' even the environmental aspects of the problematic are never envisioned. For the purpose of my thesis, key texts emerging from the ICC and the WBCSD pre- and post-UNCED and WBCSD documents published before the WSSD were briefly overviewed for their content and silences. Deconstruction of key narratives from this literature reveals themes relevant to the empirical inquiry; for example, insight into how sustainable development is presented in this paradigm; assumptions that business will be in control of any shifts made; and significant

'silences' within the narrative. Sustainable development is constructed as a series of environmental problems (Willums and Golüke, 1992; Willums, 1998), with the focus on aspects of the 'greening of enterprise' (Willums and Golüke, op. cit.; DeSimone and Popoff, 1997; Willums, op. cit.). Key themes include value creation, 'environmental excellence' as part of business excellence, TQM techniques, life-cycle design, eco-efficiency, environmental regulation and the provision of *sound science* information sources, the Natural Step[141] programme, and industrial ecology. The principal tools to be used are environmental management systems, life-cycle approaches, design for environment, remanufacturing and dematerialisation, accounting for the environment and environmental reporting. The role of technology is strongly emphasized, and there is a tendency to provide illustrative corporate 'case studies' of how corporations have responded (Willums and Golüke, 1992). They rely for their authority on industry and international declarations such as the ICC Charter, the Rio Declaration and the Brundtland definition of sustainable development, although there is no problematisation of these. There are 'motherhood' observations about environmental and social problems: 'the world's poorest nations are generally unable to express their needs through markets' (Willums, 1998:27); and one can only assume that this is more than an expression of regret about lost consumers. However, these are not tools or strategies to be lightly scorned: eco-efficiency *is* an important, though not sufficient, process in moving towards sustainable development. Nor are the motives of these writers necessarily antithetical to sustainable development.[142] Nevertheless, the emphasis throughout these narratives is upon business' responsibility (and, indeed, its *right*) to resolve problems. No problematisation or more discursive approach is contemplated; nor any position where business does not hold the power. These texts are produced to reinforce corporate domination. Hence, a section on 'The Sustainable Enterprise' (Willums, 1998) focuses on business

[141] The 'Natural Step' is based on four system 'conditions' that there must be no increase in:
(i) concentrations of substances extracted from the earth's crust;
(ii) concentrations of substances produced by society;
(iii) degradation by physical means; and that, in a sustainable society
(iv) human needs are met worldwide.

[142] Golüke, like Timberlake, has a background in the earlier environmental activism movement (personal communication, 1997). Moreover, the possibility exists that these writers believe that, by energizing the business involvement in eco-efficiency practices, more profound change will follow. This theme emerged in my empirical investigation (Chapter Nine), where a participant noted that he had hoped that he could 'talk' business into changing by introducing the discourse.

remaining successful in the twenty first century: any necessary change to the role, nature and core assumptions of business is repressed.

The 'silences' in this literature reinforce the critique already provided in this Chapter and in Chapter Four. No examination is made of the capitalist economy or the management paradigm that support corporate hegemony. There is no doubt expressed that corporate domination should continue, nor any thought of increased equity or justice or of redistribution of wealth and power. There is no engagement with structural issues, and very little with that of justice beyond 'feel good' comments about poverty – which it is proposed can be overcome by economic growth. It is a very business-centric view of sustainable development that is constructed. The methods of engagement smack of public relations strategies, with environmentally oriented corporate advertisements (Willums and Golüke, 1992); disarming confessions of corporate mistakes of the past (Willums and Golüke, op. cit.; DeSimone and Popoff, 1997); photographs and pseudo-memoranda and in-house notes and other styles of 'spin' (Willums, 1998). They unquestioningly arrogate to management the privilege of determining how sustainable development will be set in place; and represent the determination to convince business and the public that the corporate world holds the sustainable development reins and that the concept is safe in their hands.

The record of the WBCSD since its inception in 1995 reveals, however, that there is nothing 'naïve' about the silences, and that these, too, are being 'addressed' through interesting discursive turns in the Council's rhetoric. Between 1996 and the WSSD in 2002, the Council rapidly extended the scope of its programme, producing many publications on a variety of aspects of social and ecological sustainability. Its rhetoric reveals a more sophisticated approach to some of the issues, akin to the pseudo-radical stance that the BCSD promoted. It appears to signify an upscaling of corporate hegemony over the agenda. The Council describes itself as 'the *pre-eminent voice* on sustainable development issues ... playing a leading role in *shaping* business' response to the challenges of sustainable development'.[143] There is no coyness about its role of appropriation and hegemony: its mission is: 'To provide

[143] www.wbcsd.com/aboutus/index.htm (emphasis added).

business leadership as a catalyst for change toward sustainable development and to promote the role of eco-efficiency, innovation and corporate social responsibility'. An interesting recent publication from the perspective of this inquiry is the 'unique learning tool' on sustainable development that it has produced (Fussler, 2002). Entitled 'Sustainable Development', the perspectives it provides are an interesting amalgamation of core business principles presented *as though this agenda were changing.* It touches upon a wide range of issues, providing a 'learning map' (p. 1) that covers issues of population, surplus wealth, standard of living, the desire for more growth, environmental degradation, 'mitigation', eco-efficiency, average growth rate, socio-economic structure, income inequality, social tension, redistribution, new values, allocation of investments and institutional improvements. I deconstruct this agenda as representing a crucial attempt to capture and 'explain' or naturalise some of the key issues that have been raised so far in this inquiry; and argue that it supports the view that business understands very clearly the major case for its own unsustainability. Some points from the rhetoric employed make the case: this document *appears* to be addressing key silences referred to above, but it does this through applying corporate 'spin' to the issues.

It adopts an informal, colloquial style to 'inform' audiences about fundamental issues. For example, it talks about the way in which we are 'hooked on growth' (p. 3), and the fact that it will take a 'joint effort' and the power of 'creative knowledge' to redesign systems that will call for 'values' and everyone's responsibility if the environment that supports us is to remain safe. This introduces the 'democratic' theme of this document: that we are all responsible and must all contribute to better ways of living with nature. There is no acknowledgement that most of the world is not 'hooked on growth', nor greedy in its consumption of resources. However, the issue of 'surplus wealth' is addressed (p. 3). A short homily explains the concept of GDP, but no critique is provided – it is taken for granted as a natural construct. It is familiarised – made to sound 'people-friendly'. For example, wealth creation is described as 'a chain of demand and supply signals' constantly 'swapped' in the market. This colloquial language signifies the familiar and quite paternalistic tone adopted in the document – an attempt is made to 'normalise' and 'naturalise' issues that actually require problematisation and critique. For example, the discourse on the standard of living focuses on the way in which consumption contributes to 'quality of

life'. A romantic narrative follows of how consumption fulfils our 'dreams', and makes possible our 'rituals' of 'shopping', 'collecting' and 'giving' which help to create our 'identity' (p. 3).[144] A lulling, 'values'-type of language makes this seem a desirable and acceptable goal, rather than the way in which greed and power are exercised and many are excluded from 'the good life'. Greed and growth are explained away by the fact that 'our economy is *programmed* for growth' (p. 3, emphasis added) – again, economic growth is promoted as natural rather than an historical construct. However, the attempt is made to cover the inevitable critique of this position by acknowledging that environmental degradation is 'draining our eco-system' to the limits; and the old debate of limits as opposed to distribution is revived.

The answer to many of the problems is eco-efficiency, which does not aim to reduce consumption, but to 'produce and consume differently'. There will be less material input but not necessarily any lowering or improved equity of levels of consumption. Measures of progress will continue to rely on 'average growth rate', which is unquestioned; although it is explained as 'wealth created, period after period, divided by the number of people in the economy' (p. 5). It seems to be assumed that targets of the critical paradigm can remain intact if they are explained and 'normalised' to the uncomprehending. The limitations of the eco-efficiency model in terms of the scale of environmental and social problems are not addressed. The inequities of the socio-economic structure are explained away with the comment that 'averages by definition level all distortions'. Again, it seems that structural issues are about to be critiqued; but it emerges that the problem with inequities is that they produce 'a deep-seated inertia'. This appears to come close to suggesting that the real problem is that the poor are not motivated to try hard enough; although the proviso is added that this is because of 'inequalities'.

It is hard to determine whether this represents Fussler's own dawning consciousness and discomfort with what he confronts; or an attempt to diffuse the critical analysis of the status quo of which, as President of the WBCSD, he must be aware. He does observe that the 'trickle down' effect from rich to poor is hard to detect; but not the

[144] This provides a rather baldly stated example of what Marcuse critiqued in '*One Dimensional Man*', 1964, and the way in which we base our status and identity on consumption.

fact that the 'trickle up' effects from poor to rich are much easier to observe. He acknowledges that the benefits have been enjoyed by a minority, and goes on to spell out the inequalities which mean that the richest 1% receives as much income as the bottom 57% or 78%, depending on how poverty is defined. The crucial problem here is not described as one of inequity, but the fact that such acute tensions can break out in local violence and challenge the prevailing social order. There is even a degree of 'chutzpah' in following on with comments about 'redistribution'. It is explained that this involves 'economic transfers within an economy' or global emergency relief or development assistance from richest to poorest; but the problems that have attached to such relief in terms of debt repayments are not addressed here. It is acknowledged that such 'redistribution' strategies do not eliminate root causes of inequality (although these causes are not problematised). What appears to be radical and to promise an institutional critique merely leaves the question hanging. There is a call for new values, which means redesigning the economy to work for all within the global limits of the planet: it means, colloquially, 'activating a couple of rescue rings' (p. 7) to the eco-innovation diagram already presented, and based on Fussler's earlier work (Fussler and James, 1996). Overall, the answer to social and environmental problems is more growth: allocation of more resources to eco-efficiency, environmental protection and technology innovation, and living from the 'dividends' rather than the 'principal' of natural systems (p. 7). The discussion of needed 'institutional improvements' calls for a 'new approach to governance', more alliances and partnerships between 'key system participants and beneficiaries' who can together 'manage' improvements towards shared objectives, which echoes existing coalitions and élites. This will need better local, national and global institutions. However, an earlier comment has signalled that this will be almost impossible to effect in a 'complex system where no-one is quite in charge'. This example of mixed values and confused rhetoric reveals the 'insidious proactivity' (Mayhew, 1997) of which the business rhetoric is capable, and the dearth of answers – apart from the traditional ones – that business can produce or is prepared to countenance. It appears to be an attempt to accommodate the 'critical' and 'radical' agenda of sustainable development; and it validates the conventional belief in the right and ability of management to provide solutions. It provides an example of the 'sinister double play' around the categories of capitalist accumulation and relations of production clothed in the rhetoric of 'greened growth' (O'Connor, M., 1994:10).

In the broader setting, also, we see that the 'new' preoccupations that have been forced upon business, and which it now seeks to manage, have produced their own rhetoric. For example, the concept of stakeholder engagement is now an increasingly popular corporate strategy. Yet social issues tend to be marginalised in these corporate initiatives – eco-efficiency, as it becomes increasingly equated with sustainable development, ignores the fundamental issues of poverty, equity, redistribution and asymmetric power relations, but does countenance acts of corporate philanthropy which make attractive PR stories while doing nothing to change the distribution of power in society. Such acts perpetuate the vision of industry leaders as 'white' or 'green' knights, iconic heroes who rescue the underprivileged, including the environment. The normative discourse outlined in this thesis represents a gap in the writings of the business groups and their individual 'prophets'. Academics have assisted in the dominant role that eco-modernism has assumed by insufficiently examining the social and cultural context of their 'case study' organisations and making reductionist conclusions that may be determined more by the discourses of industry than that of sustainable development (Welford, 1998). This was a salient reminder for the empirical study undertaken here. The semantic crux of the eco-modernist discourse is the inappropriateness of the metaphor of 'efficiency' – (a concept from neo-classical economics based around optimisation) - to illuminate the sustainable development discourse. It fails to take into account the social dimension of sustainable development.

5.4 Envisioning the Sustainable Corporation

The business rhetoric suggests that it is possible for companies to become 'sustainable', and it is increasingly common for firms to so nominate themselves. While attempts have been made to envision a sustainable corporation,[145] it is difficult to find a prescription that takes account of the broader implications of sustainable development in terms of its institutional imperative and its commitment to social and environmental justice. The dichotomy between the business model and the goals of

[145] See, for example, Hawken and McDonough, 1993; Elkington, 1994; Shrivastava and Hart, 1995; Stead and Stead, 2000; Reinhardt, 2000; Larson, Teisberg and Johnson, 2000; Holme and Watts, 2001; Epstein and Roy, 2003.

sustainable development is so wide that it seems likely that visions of 'sustainable' companies are really depicting more benignly 'viable' entities. The developing critique of eco-modernism based in political sustainability underlines the anomaly. The adherence to that model does, however, indicate two things: the scale of change required is not underestimated by business, and is being transformed into something more 'manageable'; and resistance to more radical conceptions can be anticipated. It may be that the 'sustainable corporation' is an oxymoron.

5.4.1 Business Visions of the Sustainable Corporation

One early example of an attempt to conceptualise the 'sustainable corporation' describes Davis' (1991) transition from corporate executive to establishing 'local enterprise trusts' based on the Schumacherian principle of 'subsidiarity'. This led to the role and functions of business being approached from a different perspective, one more in tune with the social goals of sustainable development. While still focused on '*managing* for sustainable development', Davis' Schumacherian stance on economics and business signals a fundamental break with basic assumptions underpinning traditional development. He notes that 'radical business transformation strategies' will be required to turn business around. His vision is based on a business transition based upon economics that takes ecological and eco-justice issues into account; that aspires to meeting human needs more broadly and equitably; and that is built upon the principle of subsidiarity. This re-visions the role, purpose and practices of business:

Some Assumptions and Beliefs for Sustainable Development

(a) Of Economies:

- Economic activity should not only be efficient in its use of all resources but should also be socially just, and environmentally and ecologically sustainable.
- The purpose should be to satisfy all human needs – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual – through personal responsibility, mutual aid and government enabling, with minimum consumption of scarce resources.
- Communities need to develop economic self-reliance as a basis for dignity and self-determination.
- Inter-trading should primarily be for an exchange of materials and skills that are naturally maldistributed.
- Activities that do not involve financial transactions are no less important than those that do. Consequently there is no justification for the maximisation of financial transactions.
- The interests of future generations, and of other communities, must not be jeopardised.

(b) Of Businesses:

- The essential purpose of a business is to provide goods and services to meet some of the needs of a defined sector of the market.
- The continuity of a business that is performing satisfactorily in fulfilling its purpose should be protected.
- The well-being of all other stakeholders is as important as that of equity shareholders.
- Through the technologies that are used, operations should enhance the environment rather that damage it, and contribute to ecological balance.
- All forms of waste should be mimimized, and renewable energy and materials should be used as much as possible.
- A company does not own all its resources; it holds them in trust to make the best possible use of them on behalf of the community. Therefore it has 'citizenship' responsibilities.
- Managers and employees together are the players in the business game. They should be enabled to participate to the limits of their abilities and have a sense of 'ownership with dignity'.
- Operating units should be kept as small as the maintenance of the unit allows.
- Companies should be dynamically innovative, striving to achieve high levels of excellence and quality in all aspects of their business, making the best use of human skills and technologies to that end.
- Investment must place equal weight on the long term as well as the short.
- Company Boards of Directors should be guided by a General Purpose Clause that reflects these assumptions and beliefs.

Table 1 Davis, 1991: Some Assumptions and Beliefs for Sustainable Development, pp. 23-24.

Nevertheless, this 're-visioning' reveals how difficult it will be to effect radical change to business paradigms where issues of asymmetric power are not also confronted. For example, Davis notes that '[s]uccess or failure depends primarily on businesses which *have control over* the human skills and the material, financial and technological resources capable of effecting the change' (1991:18, emphasis added). It appears that, even where the need for more fundamental change is recognised, and even when inspired by the visions of Schumacher, the management metaphor remains central. Another important issue is whether these precepts can be transferred from small enterprise trusts to the corporate level; or whether, in fact, they underline the need for business to abandon the corporate model.

One company founded on precepts similar to these is the 'Body Shop' which has often been cited as leading the way as a sustainable company.[146] The business grew from a firmly entrenched set of ethical values for 'business-as-*unusual*' (Roddick, 2000). However, even this ethical stance has attracted detractors and has revealed a distinct 'Achilles heel' in terms of its own employee care (Jones, 1997),[147] despite the prevailing 'family' metaphor. Roddick herself seems to have decided that it is not possible to run an ethical business in an institutionally inequitable world (Roddick, 2001). The story has been told in many articles and in other theses and is not examined here beyond the recognition that it represents another icon company for social and environmental responsibility, that its founder does recognise institutional barriers to more ethical business, and the fact that these are not easily opposed. In the end, her own 'power' to do good comes down to 'profit' used to do good.

When we turn to 'mainstream' companies, two key stories that emerged post-UNCED demonstrate that the shift to sustainable development, if not dialectically conceived, conceptually problematised and democratically authenticated, is a vulnerable goal. Such stories as the following confirm that too little discourse and problematisation is invested in decisions to make companies 'sustainable', and led to my research focus on conceptual frameworks rather than 'action' plans. Some similarities in these stories are notable. Monsanto's former CEO, Bob Shapiro, and Interface's Ray Anderson both made very public 'corporate commitments' to sustainable development. Shapiro stated that:

> '[sustainable development] involves the laws of nature – physics, chemistry and biology – and the recognition that the world is a closed system. What we thought was boundless has limits, and we're beginning to hit them. That's going to change a lot of today's fundamental economics, it's going to change prices, and it's going to change what's socially acceptable'
>
> (In Magretta, 1997).

However, Shapiro had failed to hear the reactions building up, especially in Europe and the South, against genetically modified foods which were not regarded as

[146] See, for example, the UNEP-SustainAbility surveys of environmental reporting, 1994-2000.

[147] Jones (1997) undertook a case study of The Body Shop as part of his doctoral research. A survey of employee attitudes revealed that a number of people resented the taken-for-granted assumption that they would work extra hours unpaid to fit the company's ethos of 'family' and 'commitment'; and reported that this became an issue of competition between employees – an interesting example of workplace panopticisms being set in place.

'socially acceptable'. In spite of setting up teams to deal with social responsibility and other ethical issues, he failed to anticipate the level of outrage, particularly from the developing world, against the company's top-down, hegemonic tactics towards farmers that disempowered traditional methods of farming, placing the lives and livelihoods of farmers at risk (Shiva, 2000). The company had not understood the depth of resistance to big business hegemony. Company practice provided an example of how corporate power and domination are wielded that accorded ill with Shapiro's espoused ideas of corporate change: he had overlooked the centrality of democratic principles and was still engaged in a top-heavy management paradigm.

Anderson's vision (stated in 'heroic' terms) was for:

> ' ... creating the prototypical company of the 21st century, metamorphosing, as it were, from a typical company of the 20th century, petrochemically intensive, *taking* natural resources, *making* our short-lived products, and *wasting* through emissions, effluents and scrap in all our production processes.' (In Elkington, 2001:221 – original emphasis).

His grand plan quickly met resistance at institutional level, being significantly impeded by Interface's unsettling stock market performance and financial results (Elkington, op. cit.). This revealed that even the most visionary CEO has little progressive agency against structural limits that demand instant gauges of performance such as shareholder profit. Anderson and Interface's recovery from this setback appears to be located in the shrewd implementation of eco-efficiency practices that tread more lightly on the environment, but which make an increasingly strong business case for continued growth and profit. It may be that this actually is as far as he can go, or wants to go, in changing the nature of business. In effect, this 'sustainable' company has produced its own 'discursive formation' (Hajer, 1996) which is being promoted as the new hegemony.

Both CEOs attempted to 'do good' without problematising the concept of sustainable development, the hegemonic nature of business or the political economy within which it operates. Both committed the same error: they overlooked the need for communication, for involving people, especially their own and their suppliers. Anderson, however, seems to have turned this former deficit to his business advantage by publicly including it as part of his 'learning process'. Both cases are

examples of how the taken-for-granted management paradigm and the representational power it accords to executives must be addressed before real change can take place. Shapiro noted: 'If there was a next time, I'd have much earlier dialogue with a wide range of interested parties...' (Elkington, 2001:111); while Anderson confessed: 'the critical missing factor, glaringly exposed during the over-reach stage, was a corresponding, genuine focus on people, i.e. social responsibility ... We now realise that social equity begins at home with our own people, and sustainability is not achievable without social equity.' (Elkington, op. cit., p. 222). Even more profound than this, however, was the failure by both to engage with sustainable development at a deeper conceptual level, involving reflection on the structures within which business operates and the need for these to change. They failed to understand that the hegemony of big business would not tolerate change, even - or especially - from one of its own; and neither envisioned fundamental institutional change. The crucial democratic and dialectical principles of discourse that the transition to sustainable development calls for were overlooked. The CEOs adopted heroic stances, but in the traditional hegemonic style based on their power relations within the companies. The importance of this for the empirical research was that I moved away from what a sustainable company 'does' to exploring conceptions of sustainable development and the importance of a conceptual framework and dialectical, inclusive, emancipatory discourse (including the 'threats' to business that will be faced) as the drivers for 'actions plans'. The gap that had emerged from the examination of the corporate rhetoric on sustainable development and some of its well-intentioned practices was the need for problematisation of the concept; for conceptual frameworks that recognise core themes; and for emancipatory action. The focus of my own inquiry therefore became conceptions of sustainable development and how these were constructed. To assist me in this exploration, I developed an heuristic that pitches Critical Theory against eco-modernist theory and examines conceptions in terms of 'weak' and 'strong' sustainable development.

5.4.2 A Weak-Strong Heuristic for Corporate Conceptions of Sustainable Development

The mapping of different constructions of sustainable development undertaken in Chapters Three, Four and Five provided the scope to develop a research matrix (Appendix 2) to drive the empirical investigation, located within the epistemological framework for the research and the theoretical conversations examined. The weak-strong dimensions of sustainable development that have been teased out in the literature emphasize the profound implications of sustainable development for the economy (Daly and Cobb, 1989; O'Riordan, 1991; Turner, 1993), making the heuristic keenly relevant to business. The matrix provides only a starting point and is limited at this stage to twenty selected criteria taken from the conceptual framework of the thesis: capitalism, consumption, democracy, discourse, domination, eco-efficiency, ecological sustainability, economic growth, emancipation, equity, futurity, globalisation, hegemony, ideology, management, need, policy-making, poverty, power and values (presented alphabetically, not in terms of priority). From this, an heuristic based on a continuum of 'weak' to 'strong' perspectives on sustainable development was developed (Table 2 and Appendix 2), and this was important in framing the interview schedule and analysing the evidence. Such an heuristic has been previously applied to business (Bebbington and Thomson, 1996) providing a critique that is valuable in clarifying how a sustainable company might be conceptualised. My own heuristic, which contrasts conceptions based in Critical Theory with those of the 'business case', distinguishes between the conceptual allegiances of a 'sustainable' (strong) and a 'politically sustainable' (weak) paradigm for business, with the 'strong' perspective reflecting institutional, social, environmental and economic imperatives:

'WEAK' SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	'STRONG' SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
Functional, mainstream positions	Political, progressive positions
Sustainable 'growth'	Sustainable development
The narrative of 'management'	The discourse of sustainable development and democracy.
'political sustainability'	***'sustainability'***

Table 2 The 'weak-strong' continuum of sustainable development

The attempt is thus made to contrast positions encapsulated in a worldview fixed in the eco-efficiency paradigm against one supporting radical interpretations of sustainable development. It goes beyond the 'strong' sustainability of the ecological economics approach; it requires that business begin to question and challenge the ideological basis of its own role in the capitalist political economy. It calls for structural change: 'a radical redefinition of the social contract business maintains with society' (Gladwin et al., 1995:37) and of how the earth's different societies are to live together. Developing the matrix and the heuristic clarified the basis for the questions employed in the corporate interviews and the critique of documentary evidence in the empirical research. Clearly, some personal bias is evident in the given list, since the criteria selected reflect my own perspectives on sustainable development, several of which are not commonly addressed in the eco-efficiency paradigm. The discussion in Sections 5.2 and 5.2.1 of the orientations of the business sector suggest that its own list would rest at the 'weak' end of the continuum and might comprise different criteria, such as eco-efficiency 'tools' of EMS, reporting and so on. The strong end of the continuum considers some of the fundamental causes of unsustainable development that need to be addressed before the current 'techniques' and tools promoted by business will bring about anything more than the most superficial (and probably short-term) change.

5.5 Concluding Comments

The preceding discussion suggests that companies will find it difficult, if not impossible, to make the transition to sustainable development while operating within the traditional capitalist paradigm. Eco-modernism has brought 'balanced scorecards', cleaner production, more eco-efficient use of resources, some improvement in transparency about company operations and improved engagement with a wider range of stakeholders, and these are important gains. At the same time it is still the minority of companies that are making even these changes.[148] The greatest concern about the eco-modernist paradigm is that it says nothing about emancipation

[148] For example, in the case of the UNEP-SustainAbility *'Engaging Stakeholders'* international surveys of corporate environmental reporting (1994 to present) which have gained a high profile, the focus has chiefly been on one hundred out of some thirty five thousand TNCs.

or democracy. It lacks discursivity: the dominant discourse is that of business-as-usual, embellished with some of the rhetoric of 'greening', but without an end-goal beyond maintenance ('sustainability') of the status quo. Any discursivity arises from outside the business discourse. Even in the ways that companies approach what they regard as a 'new' paradigm, the emphasis is still on the traditional business values of 'management': being 'first', gaining 'competitive advantage', seeking 'value added' benefits and 'win-win' gains through environmental and social responsibility. Little discourse underpins the decision to make these changes, and there can be little surprise that company attempts to become 'sustainable' fall down quite easily. Insufficient attention is paid to the dominant ideology that encases business and which the radical conception of sustainable development opposes; or even (at least overtly) to the question of whether the company, in fact, *wishes* to contest that ideology.

In the 'weak-strong' matrix (Table 2; and Appendix 2), I attempt to envision the *worldview*, rather than the activities, that would characterise a sustainable business – or community, or country. The question of whether we can anticipate the emergence of truly sustainable business seems to revert back to the question: 'Is capitalism sustainable?' (O'Connor, J., 1994; O'Connor, M., 1994). A number of social movements stress that global capitalism is not sustainable, however 'sustainability' is defined; while the growing concentration of political power and privilege witnessed through state and corporate domination militates against change. Capitalism largely conflates sustainable development with 'sustainable growth'; while the new 'conservation' ethic that appears to be emerging in corporations is largely to do with corporate *value* and *longevity*, safeguarding the means of future production, rather than ecological and social sustainability. It is an extension of the *maneggiare* paradigm, still based on the exploitation of the worker and nature, not on economic democracy or emancipation (O'Connor, M., 1994:2). The question to be addressed is whether capitalist production, distribution, exchange, consumption and accumulation are consistent with ecological sustainability and eco-justice (O'Connor, M., 1994:5). An affirmative answer seems unlikely in the face of domination that has included the appropriation of natural resources and human nature, resulting in worldwide domination 'over humans qua labour and reproductive power' (O'Connor, M., 1994:5). Corporate attempts to become 'sustainable', like the ones described above,

have included no critique of the *mechanisms* and *structures* that have induced capitalism's degradation of the 'conditions of production'. As Martin O'Connor points out (1994:10), and as this chapter has shown, the rhetoric of 'greened growth' and 'sustainable development' operates on a 'sinister double play' around the categories of nature/capital in order to legitimate business-as-usual, capitalist accumulation and the relations of production. The threat is that the concept of sustainable development itself is also becoming appropriated as *part* of capital. Such 'reforms' as take place are mostly cosmetic, and often achieved through political-institutional factors such as the not always visible relationship between business and government: *'state initiatives in favour of environmental quality and conservation often function as means for capital to recuperate the 'crisis' to its own ends,'* (O'Connor, M., 1994:13 – original emphasis). However, this does not signify that sustainable development is therefore a lost cause (O'Connor, op. cit.); but it does indicate that a collective social process is called for and a 'social movement discourse', with emancipation as the goal of its participants (Escobar, 1996; O'Connor, M., 1994; O'Connor, J., 1994; 1998; Dryzek, 2000). The concluding chapter of the thesis returns to this discourse. The question remaining at this point – to which this chapter has found no convincing answer - is whether business can ever become part of such a social movement.

Chapter Six

Methodology

> The reader is reminded that what is offered is one story – at best empirically sensitive and well-grounded, and full of insights and theoretical contributions, but still open to other readings, and informed by other perspectives, interests and creative powers.
>
> Alvesson and Deetz, *Doing Critical Management Research*, 2000.

6.1 Introduction

The methodological choices and evidentiary strategies that arose from the re-theorisation of the research inquiry in Critical Theory and other non-totalising theories are described and justified in this chapter.[149] The ensuing re-problematisation of the discourse changed the nature of the questions for the empirical research, the central question becoming:

> What conceptions of sustainable development are held by managers in major corporations and key informants in the broader social, political and economic context in New Zealand, and how are these conceptions constructed?

From this broad inquiry, the themes and research questions in Appendix 3 were constructed. The theorisation brought to my research an examined set of concepts that had a dual purpose: it negotiated how my observations and the research data were conceptualised, guiding me both in the empirical observations and my interpretations of them (Sayer, 1984). The worldview I brought to the research story shaped the epistemological constructions of the empirical research and governed the methodological choices made. The theorisation also underlined the fact that perspectives, concepts, values and beliefs that the participants and I brought to the research task were historically shaped and socially constructed. Some of the values and beliefs encountered which had become 'reified' or 'naturalised' over time called

[149] The decision to re-theorise my research in Critical Theory, and the immediate impact this had upon the literatures engaged with, the problematisations and 'gaps' addressed and the nature of the resolutions provided in my macro-story, were introduced in Chapter One. In Chapter Ten, I provide an auto-critique of how the re-theorisation and the process it produced 'worked' for the research.

upon the emancipatory power of the theory to open up issues of 'virtual reality'. This proved one of the most challenging engagements of the research. Some of the supposed 'reality' of understandings of sustainable development proved impenetrable; while in other cases, alternative views were emancipated through the discourse, and 'illusion' was reduced.

The research paradigm significantly shaped my role as researcher: it influenced the relationships established with the participants, the nature of the questions asked, and, subsequently, the story constructed from the research evidence. It was important to be open with participants about my own position, while employing the role to facilitate the emancipation of new thinking about domination. This role was integral to the development of a 'site of contestation' (Gramsci, 1988), where conceptions could be deconstructed, demystified and reconstructed through the discourse and the production of 'transformative redefinition' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). This was carried out, as far as was possible, within the conditions Habermas describes for the 'ideal speech situation', where people enter the discourse as equals and without fear. The aim was to stimulate the potential for emancipatory change in others in the process of trying to achieve it for myself as researcher (Sayer, 1984), which, along with other aspects of the interviews, raised issues of power that I had to resolve situationally and also interpret in my 'story'. These preliminary comments on how my role was constructed by the theorisation of the research are expanded in Section 6.6.

The nature of my research goals, added to the complexity of the concept of sustainable development, called for dialogic and dialectical interactions throughout the research process (Harvey, 1996). This also determined the research methods selected and how these were employed. The research was designed to be transactional and openly subjectivist: the inquiry and findings have been influenced by my own values as well as those of the participants. It was determined at the start that 'objectivity' in the positivist sense was not relevant in a study where knowledge is understood as value-mediated and value-dependent, just as the concept of sustainable development itself is heavily value-laden (Redclift, 1987; Eder, 1996a). The goal was to re-examine value-laden conceptions of sustainable development and how these had been constructed. This goal and the theorisation of the research

determined the sampling strategies employed, which are described in Section 6.3.1. I worked principally with an élite group of managers in capitalist corporate and government settings: hence, there were innate tensions between my theory and the corporate settings from the start. An emerging critical literature was already claiming that capitalist business had captured sustainable development in the name of 'public good' in order to re-legitimate its own dominant role in the economy (Chapter Four). This tension required openness with the participants about the subjective, value-laden nature of the research we were engaged in. Nevertheless, that is not to suggest that the outcomes of the research do not have elements of 'objectivity' (Sayer, 1984). There was also an element of 'action research' introduced into the methodology through the participant workshops built around the three group interviews. These focus group meetings kept the research process interactive and open-ended, and helped to create a multi-dimensional discourse where positions and beliefs were discussed and, from time to time, reconsidered and shifted. This degree of interactivity was central to the emergence of new themes and issues that were then reflexively built into later workshops and interviews.

6.2 Comments on Qualitative Methods

The research represents an inductive study of socially constructed reality (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Qualitative methods were chosen to enable the investigation that the contested and complex nature of the concept of sustainable development required into the cognitive and linguistic mind-maps of sustainable development constructed by participants. This made it possible to explore areas of ambiguity that arose, not as a 'problem', but as an important aspect of a discursive inquiry. It did not result in loss of 'qualitative rigour', but contributed to the interpretation of the different ways in which a complex construction is understood, and sometimes re-understood. The 'ambiguity' that was unearthed contributed to the research findings created through the dyad between myself and the participants. Furthermore, 'ambiguity' is not the same as 'inconsistency', which, when it did occur, had to be sensitively reflected back and its basis explored. The story was, then, enriched by the 'openness, ambiguity and indeterminacy' emerging from the discursive approach (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000:69). I sought to employ qualitative methods in the way that Van Maanen

describes them: as 'an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the *meaning*, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world' (1988:9, emphasis added). The charge that qualitative approaches focus too much on what things 'mean' to people was balanced by 'the awareness that discourse and ideological and structural forces may operate "*behind the back*" of the subjects being studied' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000:70, emphasis added). This signalled two important things: that the research should be based in the 'natural performance contexts' of the participants (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1997); and that the emancipatory force of the theory should, where possible, be employed to expose ideological and structural forces.

6.3. Research Design

My inquiry is designed in three parts, and the linkages between these are strong. My goal was to understand how conceptions of sustainable development are constructed by middle to senior managers in capitalist corporations. The next step was to 'contextualise' these by examining the conceptions held by key informants in the social, political and business context of corporations; and then to contextualise both sources of evidence by examining key documentary artefacts that were promulgating 'formal' conceptions of sustainable development, and to explore the level of corroboration that was emerging. These three sources of evidence are not treated separately, but are each wound into the major themes that have emerged.

6.3.1 Sampling Strategies

The theoretical perspective of my research, its conceptual aims and the nature of the questions I wished to explore largely determined the evidentiary strategies for the research, and resulted in the selection of the 'corporate interview' as the chief strategy (Schoenberger, 1991). This choice also influenced the sampling strategies for the research and shaped the ways in which I sought the research evidence. I first describe the strategies employed for constructing the sample of middle to senior corporate managers. The 'critical' nature of the investigation itself called for two key

qualities if the evidence gained was to transcend a superficial level. One was a level of understanding between researcher and participants, and between participants themselves, that created a rich context where people could be persuaded to explore and re-explore their conceptions of sustainable development. It ideally required something akin to the 'ideal speech situation' (Habermas, 1972) which is based upon equal relationships and dialogue that is, as far as possible, unalloyed by asymmetric power. I believed that this level of understanding would provide the basis for an ongoing research relationship from which it was anticipated a level of reflexivity might emerge. However, it is also something that takes time to develop; and is not likely to arise from questionnaires or interviews with large, statistically representative samples where the contact between researcher and participants is limited, and that between participants themselves is non-existent. The second quality sought was that the process might be dynamic, with the evolving story-in-process emerging from the natural performance contexts of the participants. This was created in three ways. The managers in what became the 'focus group' came from companies I had engaged with previously through a national survey[150] and other research on business and sustainability. Although new members did join the group over the period of the research, the core group members had mostly known each other in this capacity for about two years. Most of them were used to interacting as a group and with me, although we had not previously been engaged in anything as intensive as this programme. The sample is not, then, statistically representative; nor was this judged to be necessary, given the goals and methods of my research. It represents a small, intensive study where the goals pursued arose from the *process of engagement* with a group of people who shared some similarities and exhibited some differences. The group participants do not necessarily represent the whole population of middle to senior managers in New Zealand.[151] [152] [153]

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[150] See Chapter One.

[151] Appendix 4 provides information about the composition of the group.

[152] Ages in the group ranged from approximately thirty to late fifties. Only three in the group were women. There was an ethnographic mix: two were Maori; two were Fijian Indian; four were English; one was South African; and the remainder were European New Zealanders.

[153] Appendix 4 lists the industries represented in the group, based on ANZSIC codes. Care was taken to include as widely representative a group of industries as possible, to gain broad industry coverage, and to release participants from 'rivalry' between 'competitors'. Of sixteen companies, twelve were completely or largely (more than 50%) overseas-owned.

Most of the participants were men, and the significance of this for a female researcher is examined in Section 6.6. There were sixteen people in the focus group, although additional members of companies sometimes attended the group workshops, for example, to represent a participant who was overseas at the time, or merely from interest,[154] so that there were anything up to twenty people present. The composition of the group also changed as people moved, sometimes involuntarily as a result of the volatile nature of several of the companies. Nevertheless, the strength of the group for my research was that we could build upon knowledge of and relationships with each other – we had a 'history', and were not constrained, even initially, to work at a superficial level which might have been dictated by a larger, more statistically representative sample or a different theorisation. I had some prior knowledge of the members and of group norms and 'mores': there was no pretence of starting with a *tabula rasa*, which meant that engagement in meaningful discourse developed quickly. The prior communicative and social skills built up within the group helped the transition to a more discursive and dialogic interchange. I believe that this 'unrepresentative conjuncture' (Sayer, 1984) ultimately revealed more about general processes and structures within corporate settings than a more extensive study with a broader but less well-understood population, not involved with each other in the process, might have done. This level of understanding resulted in reflexivity emerging quite quickly in the research and in some emergent themes that will provide a focus for the ongoing future research programme. Secondly, there was little compunction in the group about expressing any *resistance* to the research paradigm itself: and counter-questions, dissonances and disputation were not repressed as dissonance replaced 'harmony' (Sayer, 1984:231). This occurred as personally held views of participants were shaken; as dissonance was recognised between workplace conceptions and practices and those of participants; or as dissonance (or perceived dissonance) between the views of participants and my own as researcher was challenged. These 'dissonances' fed into the discursivity of the research process and enriched the story. The participants knew that I could cope with contestation; and we had all experienced insights emerging from contested discourse

[154] This resulted in more women being involved in the groups, although in an ancillary role to the 'senior' male manager.

in previous work together. It was also an important part of my 'educational' role to encourage and facilitate latent 'contestation' as being key to a discursive approach.

The inclusion of the natural performative contexts of the participants was achieved in several ways. The workshops were hosted by members of the group within their own companies: the 'host' was on home territory, and the 'guests' were also in familiar territory and a natural linguistic context (as opposed, for example, to a university seminar room). The venue changed from city to city, which meant that most participants had to travel long distances to the venue, signalling some commitment in view of the time factor for busy managers. As researcher, in the role of 'participant-observer' (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1984; Adler and Adler, 1994), I did not feel out of place in the contexts on account of my frequent visits to the companies for this research and the national survey. The change of context also played a part in preventing any contextual 'rules' or norms from developing. Individual interviews were also conducted at participants' companies in a venue of their own choosing; and were usually accompanied by a 'walkabout' to observe the location and for introduction to other staff. This provided increased authenticity to my interpretation of the research data, as the stories were located in their natural contexts; and, for this research, the context was an important part of the story-telling 'event' in process. In seven cases, the research extended to separate interviews with the CEO or former CEO of the company, and the managers facilitated these meetings for me, which was important, as they needed to know my purpose in interviewing the CEO, and that it did not signify a level of 'surveillance'.[155] I consider that this contextualisation of the research encouraged the degree of reflexivity that emerged. I also acknowledge that this level of 'friendly colleaguiality' might not have been as easy to establish outside New Zealand, where there are still norms operating about 'equality', and it is not considered appropriate to 'act out' one's authority. Consequently, even at government level, gaining access proved unproblematic. The ongoing contact with participants through group workshops and individual meetings over a period of a year produced a 'serialised' story, with reflexivity developing between the 'sections' or 'chapters'. It came to reflect some of the features of Habermas' ideal speech

[155] It became something of a joke that I saw more of the CEO than the managers themselves tended to; but the 'joke' revealed a significant feature of corporate life that indicates one way in which the discourse on sustainable development is constrained within companies.

situation: for example, it was notable that younger, less senior members of the group engaged comfortably with older and very senior members to further the discourse.[156] They were 'equal' participants in the meetings. At the second and third group meetings, it became possible to raise issues of power in the workplace; their own 'agency' as managers; and the institutional model that encourages unsustainability. It was chiefly in these meetings that more counter-hegemonic views began to emerge: possibly because of the contestation some members introduced early on, which itself led to a degree of reflexivity; but also, I believe, because a 'space' had been developed where it was safe to consider counter-hegemonic positions, to make connections between personally held beliefs and corporate behaviour; and even for group members to reflect on some 'identity' issues.

One other comment is needed. I had considered the idea of working with a 'control' group that did not have the shared background of this group. This had been in order to make some claims for 'objectivity' and 'validity'; and may signify my desire to 'make my case' for the qualitative methods and non-representative sample chosen for my research. I eventually determined against this as providing a valuable contribution. The result would have been to attempt comparisons of constructions of sustainable development between two very different groups, which would, in the event, have invalidated comparisons. It would not have been possible to replicate the 'contextual importance' of the focus group. The sample I elected to work with made possible an intensive strategy, in keeping with the intensive epistemology that drives the research, that moved quickly into a discursive debate that had more depth than generally characterises the industry discourse about sustainable development. The focus group situation was more conducive to the stimulation of emancipatory change and the reduction of illusion about some aspects of business and sustainable development. This was not constructed as a 'utopian' exercise: education is not sufficient to effect social change – but it may expose what are the constraints. Radical Marxist theorists would argue 'the point *is* to change it' (Sayer, 1984:229, emphasis added); my goals at this stage were focused on the internal process of reduction of illusion and the emancipation that precedes change. In the end, I decided

[156] One habit that developed was that group members would phone others in the group to enquire about some activity in their company that had been mentioned, or to ask advice: a level of networking that arose spontaneously.

that it was important to place my faith in the 'validity' of the qualitative dialectical approach that I believed would best support my chosen exploration. I concluded that 'statistical generalizability' could 'usefully be sacrificed' (Schoenberger, 1991:181) - if, indeed, it would have been contributed to by a 'control' group – for the sake of a more comprehensive explanation arising from intensive discursivity.

The research process with the focus group involved three day-long meetings during 2002, with hour-long individual interviews taking place between these. We had held previous meetings on 'issues' such as governance, leadership, corporate social responsibility, supplier programmes and sustainable development reporting. I had negotiated with the group that the focus of the meetings was to change. The practical and ethical issues involved are discussed in Section 6.4 and 6.5. (The themes and questions employed in the interviews are provided in Appendix 3).

The second sample of key informants represented a cross-section of people in senior positions who are either formally engaged through their work in developing and promulgating policies and conceptions of sustainable development; who have influence with companies; or who are noted for their interest and influence in the area of sustainable development in other ways. Only two of the sixteen subjects from the broader context were female, which reflects that men still tend to hold the senior management positions in government departments as well as business organisations. This group is secondary to the managers' group, but important in terms of how issues of sustainable development are contextualised in New Zealand and for any possible influence that flows between the organisations represented in this sample and companies, or vice versa.[157] In some cases, it was not possible to obtain interviews with individuals from government or business organisations that I had hoped to include in this sample. The same interview schedule was employed as for the managers, and individual interviews of about one hour were held at least once with each person. The two streams of interviews, along with the examination of publicly available documents, enabled a level of triangulation to emerge within the research to corroborate key evidence employed in the interpretation. The interviews with senior managers from the social and political context of business also provided insights into

[157] The full composition of the context group is provided in Appendix 5.

the natural performative and linguistic contexts of policy-makers that the examination of documents on their own could not provide.

The document analysis[158] included publicly available materials from government and business organisations: for example, government documents leading up to and post the WSSD (2002) were examined for the government position on sustainable development, and particularly, as the research proceeded, for any early signals that *no* strategy would, in fact, emerge before or after the Earth Summit. Documents were critically examined for definitions and conceptions of sustainable development that were being promulgated, including core themes that emerged, as well as linguistic and other semiotic signals of how the agenda was being interpreted, and the sources of any 'influences' that could be discerned (Jupp, 1996). They were also scrutinised for signals of coalitions forming around the concept. The emerging trends were then followed up in the interviews.

6.3.2 Methods

The construction of the above samples provided me with a number of 'cases' for study, augmented through the analysis and interpretation of the documents to provide opportunities for triangulation. Case study itself is not a methodological choice defined by the methods of inquiry used (Stake, 1994) but a choice of object to be studied which was defined by my interest in the cases and why they were constructed. The epistemological question was: 'What can be learned from these cases?'; and my study was designed to optimise the understanding that my story, based on the cases, could provide. The 'case' comprises both the process and product of learning. The 'focus group' that I had 'created' through the research process leading up to my inquiry comprised an 'instrumental' case formed specifically for the purposes of the intensive study. The looser grouping of research subjects selected as representative key informants from the business research context provided a 'collective' case study. There was a structural relationship between the two that enabled me to look for influences between them. I was interested to discover how people from the companies were influenced by the policies and accounts of actors in

[158] Appendix 6 provides details of the documentation examined.

the contextual group which included government and professional bodies and significant policy-makers; and whether the conceptions of the collective group were influenced by those of industry, or some parts of industry. Stake (1994) comments that cases rarely fit neatly into the outlined categories, and I have used the terms 'instrumental' and 'collective' loosely in describing the groups, employing the different styles of case study as heuristic strategies rather than functional ones. It was important to me in preparing the story of the research to think of them as 'cases' in order to define the different, or similar, stories that emerged from each 'case', to discover what is unique and what is shared in each story, as well as the extent to which these features are reflected or not in the documentation. Ultimately, this helped to tell a unified story based around a number of key themes, rather than relate the stories directly to source and provide, as it were, three accounts. I now tell a complex story about different facets of the business and sustainable development narrative in New Zealand. I have focused, not on the intrinsic interest of each 'case', but on the level of generalisation that has emerged from the discursive process to represent the 'big picture' in New Zealand. These major themes reveal how sustainable development is being constructed in New Zealand chiefly as an aspect of eco-modernism with a good deal of linguistic and semiotic struggle taking place. This has resulted in reliance on a 'management' paradigm, with powerful coalitions contributing to the appropriation of the concept. At the same time, there is an emerging level of contestation and counter-hegemony that suggests the struggle is not yet complete. The dominant themes that emerged thus framed and organised the research story told and helped to construct my 'critical' narrative. This made the methods used and the evidence strongly 'researcher-dependent'. However, the opportunities provided for triangulation and corroboration helped to balance any subjective choices made. This provided objectivity in Sayer's sense (1994), rather than calling upon positivist interpretations of 'objectivity' which would have risked losing the texture and vividness of the story I have told. The story has emerged from a multi-method, multi-source approach that made it possible to view the themes through different methodological windows.

The methods used to create the case studies relied strongly on relatively loosely structured approaches, providing a rich, 'thick' account of the experiences, knowledge, ideas and impressions of the participants in unconstrained situations,

whether in the focus group workshops or the individual interviews. The decision to employ the open-ended 'corporate interview' (Schoenberger, 1991) as the major evidentiary strategy of my research methods provided a tool that can be sensitive to institutional and strategic complexity. It can challenge the economic and social status quo and the way business is carried out, calling for more sensitive ways of understanding reified and evolving corporate views. It relies on an unstandardised format and open-ended questions; and its goal is to understand behaviour in complex and ongoing processes (Schoenberger, 1991). The qualitative corporate interview recognises that companies are institutional agents 'embedded in a complex network of internal and external relationships' (Schoenberger, op. cit., p. 181). They are complex by nature of their own character as organisations and the individuals that populate them, with constraints and possibilities that are difficult to disentangle, particularly where a contested concept like sustainable development is brought into the equation. I regarded this as a highly appropriate method for engaging with managers and companies on a concept that signifies considerable economic and social change: the corporate interview would become part of *their* experience in thinking about such change. The strategy also promised to reveal more of the 'real world predicaments' posed for companies than statistical generalizability could provide.

Some care was taken in structuring the workshops and interviews to ensure that the advantages of the corporate interview were realised. Where the focus group interview formed part of a one-day workshop, the 'interview' section of the workshop was 'separated' from the rest of the day's proceedings in terms of room arrangements and materials used, but not in such a way as to 'formalise' or 'stiffen' that part of the process: it was simply underlined in an understated way that, for that part of the day, we were engaged in a process of joint research. The evidence unearthed from the interviews was not automatically regarded as 'innocent': statements were clearly related to the interview context, possibly governed by scripts about what interviews are *for* and what is required: for example, one focus group participant clearly had not expected that the questions would open up geo-political issues (see Chapters Seven and Nine). The interviews were more than data-collection tools: they represented 'social situations' and provided 'the scene of a conversation' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). I attempted to bring to them a Pyrrhonian scepticism,

not naïvely believing that unstructured interviews capture genuine experiences (Silverman, 1985); and aware that people in an interview context 'use their language to *do things*, to *order* and *request*, *persuade* and *accuse*' (Potter and Wetherall, 1987:32, emphasis added).

An important issue centred on the locus of control in the interviews. One goal was to avoid exercising the 'greater authority and control' (Schoenberger, 1991) sometimes attributed to the interviewer on account of her being 'in charge' of the theory, methods and questions of the research, and supposedly an 'expert' in the chosen field of study. At the same time, companies and managers have considerable power over what a researcher may and may not do: they may contrive the investigator's loss of control over the situation. Corporate managers are used to exerting authority over the agendas of others; not least, in taking the agenda in an unintended direction, and I record examples of this strategy being employed in the research narrative. I decided that the best strategy to avoid dealing with too many such problems lay within the research methodology itself. My goal was collaborative, discursive dialogue aimed at 'engaging' participants in the research problem: that is, to establish joint control over a journey we were making together for shared reasons. This involved participants in shaping the content of the research without needing to 'appropriate' the agenda: I sought their intellectual engagement in an interactive dialogue (Schoenberger, 1991). The people worked with were highly intelligent, experienced managers and policy-makers who had learned how to survive in competitive corporate and political situations; adept, if they wished, at 'playing at being interviewed' or of subverting the agenda of the interview – at least, temporarily. CEOs, in particular, might have been tempted to use their 'power' or authority in the interview. However, I believed that this kind of obfuscation was also capable of informing the research in useful and insightful ways (for example, see Chapter Eight). The research goals of 'insight' and 'critique' and of Foucauldian 'scepticism' were therefore invaluable in providing an acute awareness of what was going on in the interview context and a lens to take these 'alternative truths' into account, employ them in the interviews, and avoid the negative consequences of 'demonising' participants who also 'used' the interview situation. Such possible 'drawbacks' have, in several instances, been taken into account in the narrative as part of 'what was going on' in a real situation: games being played sometimes illuminated the research. However, the level of political

understanding and interaction reached with participants appeared to reduce the perceived need to play self-protective games, even where difficult questions were being posed. This is best reflected in the evidence of the counter-hegemonic views that began to emerge, the divulging of information that did not reflect well on company practice, and the degree of reflexivity that emerged during the research process. The opportunity to reflect on beliefs and concepts participants had taken for granted saw some positions change as people discovered new levels of meaning in concepts (Sayer, 1984): in other words, the 'restoration of meaning' sometimes slid into 'the reduction of illusion' (Ricouer, 1976, cited in Sayer, 1984:41).

The evidence from the interviews was supplemented with that from the content analysis and semiotic textual analysis of the publicly available documents selected (Appendix 6). In addition, although the research story does not dwell on these aspects, the company literature provided (reports, policy documents, internal newsletters, 'grey' literature), as well as letters, notes and emails between myself and group members, all added to the 'thick' texture of the active communication that surrounded the development of the research story. This also engaged participants, and it was interesting to note, in a number of cases, that the company's engagement in my research was recorded in newsletters or sustainability/environmental reports.[159] The texture of the discourse was intensified by observations carried out of buildings and artefacts, which, in a Marxian sense, provide 'material traces of behaviour' (Hodder, 1994). The physical settings of the focus groups and interviews transmitted messages about working conditions, commitment to sustainable development, and hierarchical structures that spoke, in some cases loudly, as 'official rhetoric'. This ranged from the redundant grandeur of corporate foyers and CEO offices to the observed 'waste' in terms of excessive and unnecessary lighting.

The ways in which I collected and stored the evidence gathered through the above research methods were also important. All interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participant(s). These were professionally transcribed by audio-typists who signed a confidentiality agreement and did not keep copies of any of the

[159] The point is not overlooked that such company reporting of engagement with a university researcher on issues of business and sustainable development might contain an element of positive 'P.R.'.

evidence. Notes on my observations were made immediately after interviews, and later reviewed and framed within themes from the theory. An attempt was made to encourage the focus group participants to record their own conceptual impressions or observations on a practical level in small notebooks that I provided. However, this last aspect of the data collection did not work well. There was initially a reasonably high degree of commitment to the idea. Early on, individuals revealed on my visits to them how they were using the notebook; but it tended to be to record events (often from the national media) rather than personal reflections; and I had to recognise also that these extremely busy people had little time to reflect on and record items in this way; nor was it part of their modus operandi.

6.4 Other Research Practicalities

One practicality of conducting the research was to negotiate contractual arrangements with the focus group and all other participants. I negotiated a reasonably flexible verbal contract, having been alerted to some of the ways in which asymmetric power can be exerted over the researcher's work where written contracts are adhered to and then used in non-negotiated ways (Bradshaw, 2001). The reason for this decision was not to elude responsibility, but to avert the possibility of negative outcomes that might make further research with the group and individuals difficult to negotiate. I believed that the 'honouring' of contracts by companies and their decision not to exercise undue control over the research outcomes would depend on the research relationship established between myself and them. The 'earnest' of my contract with the participants was demonstrated in the way I conducted the research, and have taken care of confidentiality commitments and people. I have received no complaints or expressed concerns; and the interest in the research continues. The coding of participants' responses was discussed with the group and all individuals, and no-one required more codification than title and industry sector (for example, 'Environmental Manager, Electricity Utility'); although I have subsequently reduced titles to initials. Ethical and contractual issues that were discussed at the first focus group meeting are provided in Appendix 7; and the same issues were covered, although more succinctly, with the individual participants. The members of the group (and most of the individual participants) had been phoned

beforehand and points they raised in these talks were incorporated in the overview; while issues were discussed in everyday language and questions taken and answered. The tape recordings were transcribed and examined immediately after the meetings while nuances and visual images were still fresh in my mind, then edited and the evidence gathered for different themes of the research story as these began to emerge. The company documentation, although not analysed in my thesis, nevertheless provided corroboration of views, or indicated in some cases that participants' views differed from or were more critical than those publicly espoused by the companies. My methods of examining the interview data were based upon deep 'immersion' in the transcripts over a long period of time. Also, because of the ongoing nature of the research, it meant that issues I needed to check from the transcripts could be followed up at the next group or individual meeting. I chose the immersion method to examine the evidence over the option of using a soft-ware package because I believed the method was in keeping with the nature of the research conducted, which was based upon growing relationships and close contact. 'Immersion in the evidence' has not only been my preferred research practice: I elected not to employ a 'mechanical' procedure as part of the 'dialectical' process. Another belief (or bias) that I hold is that the results from a software programme are as good as the evidence fed in, and this means that the 'immersion' stage becomes absolutely vital to getting good results from the programme. My preference, then, was to employ the data from that evidence without the 'interruption' of a further strategy.

6.5 Politics and Ethics

> It is only if it is recognised that part of 'the facts' about human existence is that it depends considerably on societies' self-understanding, that it is socially produced, albeit only partly in intended ways, and that changes in this self-understanding are coupled with changes in society's objective form, that it becomes possible to see how knowledge can simultaneously be not only explanatory and descriptive but also evaluative, critical and emancipatory. (Sayer, 1984:45).

Concerns have been expressed about a politically engaged research dialectic such as the study represents (Welch, 1991, cited in Punch, 1994). The 'political' nature of my research raised some ethical issues to address that were over and above the ones

traditionally attended to. A fundamental task, of course, was to undertake the research in ways that would not be harmful to participants. All of the normal ethical concerns applied to my research and were observed, such as gaining informed consent after truthfully informing participants about the research, its purpose and the way it was to be conducted, and answering their questions about this. The right of participants to protection of their identity, safety from physical or emotional harm, and respect for their gender, ethnic background, age and status were all observed; and the fact that the focus group stayed involved in the research throughout the year demonstrates, I believe, that ethical care and professional courtesy were established. I also negotiated issues of access and restriction of access to the company sites involved, which included interviews with CEOs where possible. In a number of cases, the manager from the group was present at the CEO interview; and some stated that they thought it a good idea that I was interviewing the CEO in terms of raising the importance of the agenda. The fact that the main outcome of my research was my doctoral thesis, but that there would be other kinds of publications (and possibly some researcher-participant industry contributions) was negotiated at the start and was unproblematic. We already had one example of my contributing with a member of the group to a business school text-book.

The issue of researcher veracity and integrity is vital to the degree of commitment that can be expected from participants. The focus group was already aware through our partnership in the national survey that I had unfailingly safeguarded company identity and performance scores in the face of persistent attempts by consultants and others to elicit information from me. However, the question of how 'honest' the researcher is prepared to be about the research purpose is a particularly sensitive one where 'critical' research is conducted: it raises 'political' issues that may make people uncomfortable. There are examples in the story (Chapter Seven) of my question about 'social and economic arrangements' causing immediate alarm for two participants, even though, within my theorisation of the research, I had taken care to avoid a totalising approach, and was careful in the way I framed this question. I talked to the focus group about the way in which my research was theorised, without using technical language. I tended to introduce ideas by such phrasing as: 'Something I've been reading about that I've found interesting, and I'd like to explore further with you ...'. I discovered that this was also a relatively safe way for

members of the group themselves to start to think about some ideas and talk about them: the ideas were 'intellectualised' and put 'out there' as 'interesting ideas' to explore rather than ideologies adhered to. The degree to which I could introduce concepts from the epistemological framework increased as the year proceeded, and this contributed to the emancipatory goals of the research.

The issue of how 'honest' to be about the political agenda of my research potentially posed a problem. It is difficult for the counter-hegemonic researcher to 'honestly' adopt the role of 'impartial collector of "the facts" of the case' (McDowell, 1992:214) when the research is built on a political commitment and the responses collected will be framed in a narrative that is shaped by that commitment. This indicates the possibility of 'partiality' emerging in the account of the empirical research (McDowell, 1992). I would argue, in response to this, that the narrative account, including its 'partiality', is part of a 'grand narrative' that the totality of the research relates. The empirical narrative is interpreted within the theoretical framework of the research: it illustrates aspects of that meta-narrative and does not claim to have universal applicability or objectivity. It becomes part of the way of telling a particular story. The 'quality' of the knowledge thus produced is contingent, not on measures of 'validity' or 'objectivity', but on the 'permanently self-critical stance' that the researcher adopts (Schoenberger, 1992:216). This means that the research is essentially about 'interpretation'; and the integrity and usefulness of that interpretation rests with the researcher's constantly interrogating her material and interpretations (Schoenberger, 1991), not with statistical representativeness. How much the researcher reveals of her 'politics' and worldview is an interesting dilemma. Schoenberger doubts that corporate managers have concerned themselves much with her 'politics', and that the reason for this hinges on 'class': she argues that her demeanour in conducting the interview levels the playing field between herself and powerful corporate figures (professional status, language, and dress acting as signifiers), so that social relations are established that encourage the participants to 'willingly reveal' their thoughts (Schoenberger, op. cit., p. 218). This is similar to the 'social relations' I engineered for my own research interviews. I 'power-dressed', but avoided power-games, and did not seek to establish 'researcher authority'. I made sure I had at my fingertips relevant knowledge about the company's and the industry's current performance. I was up with the political play in New Zealand, and

with relevant global issues and their implications for business. Most of the participants had witnessed my giving addresses in Parliament in the presence of Ministers and key business people. We consequently met on a reasonably level playing-field. Nor did I experience the need to 'disguise' my politics, as implied by McDowell (1992), although I did not make an issue of the political underpinnings of the research. I found, more in keeping with Schoenberger (1992), that managers were, by and large, not worried by this issue. However, as noted, I did experience 'challenges' that arose from the nature of some of the questions and the discomfort these aroused in some people.[160]

A further aspect of researcher 'honesty' applies to the way that I, as my own 'research instrument', have affected the interpretation of the evidence. I am clearly open to questions about 'what really happened', and how my research story may have become 'skewed' in the act of interpretation (Denzin, 1994). One way that I attempted to be clear that I understood what people 'really meant' in interviews was to check regularly through paraphrase and reflecting comments back to them as questions. This, in fact, highlighted some ambiguity and gave participants the chance to clarify their thinking or to express their thoughts more clearly. In terms of interpreting the evidence later on, I kept beside me an ethical *aide-memoire* that reminded me to ask: 'Why did I interpret it *that* way? Why did I say *that*? What made me see it *that* way?' Clearly, the interpretation I have provided has been 'filtered', not only by my values-stance and the theory and methods I brought to the research, but by participants themselves: the knowledge gained is 'filtered through the processes by which people make sense of their own experience' (Bourdieu, 1977, cited in Schoenberger, 1991:183). This filtering need not be a drawback. The participants' interpretations of what was 'going on' have 'independent' value, since they understand business and their situation within it and may be considered best situated to interpret that in order to present *their own* understandings, rather than a supposedly 'objective' account. Associated with this area of interpretation is that of the language used by the researcher and her understanding of the language used by the participants. This signalled a need for particular care over the ways in which language was used in my research study, where one of the mechanisms of

[160] See, for example, Chapter Seven.

'appropriation' being considered is linguistic and semiotic capture by groups exercising 'control' over sustainable development. This applied to me as researcher as much as to the participants. One example of the need for linguistic clarification would be what participants understood by 'a sustainable company'.

Such issues are again clearly connected with my political motives in undertaking research with a theory-laden, political agenda in the sensitive field of corporations and sustainable development. My theory shaped what I was listening for; but the discursive approach meant that I was not listening for 'consent' to my own views. My normative goal of freeing conceptions of sustainable development from restraints, dogmas or falsehoods carried with it particular responsibilities for the conduct of the research. My stated goals of generation of emancipatory praxis and empowerment of participants called for openness and honesty in an area where openness could itself result in alarm. Interestingly, apart from the two reactions referred to above and in Chapter Seven, there was little reaction against the 'political' aspects of the research. There was some reaction to the political nature of sustainable development *itself*; and, for example, disapproval of the government's purported 'capture' of sustainable development (Chapter Eight). It is also possible that this was, in fact, part of a reaction to the research. Schoenberger (1991) and McDowell (1992) debate the extent to which the researcher can be open about the 'political' nature of her research. Aware of this problem, but seeking the integrity of not 'hiding' my position, I refrained from 'arguing politics'. However, the import of the questions asked was not lost on highly intelligent managers. There were some instances of being asked directly, 'Well, what do you think?' The dilemma here was to convey, without appearing to avoid the question, that the research situation was not constructed to discuss my politics or to provide me with a didactic opportunity. Nor did I wish to obfuscate over my position. My tendency was to respond with a comment such as: 'Well, you probably recognise that I come from a different position. What I'm trying to understand better is ...'. This made it possible to engage in a discourse rather than an argument; and put the focus back where it was intended to be – on their conceptions and what had influenced and shaped them. I would also suggest that the fact that this was not quizzed further echoes Schoenberger's belief that corporate managers were not really interested in her 'politics': it is one aspect that puts the 'importance' of the researcher into context. Schoenberger (1991) and

McDowell (1992) debate the issue of whether the researcher, her 'authority' or her 'partial' position pose any threat in the face of considerable corporate power. I would be inclined to suggest that any 'threat' I posed was in the ability to engage them in a discussion they had perhaps not anticipated when agreeing to the interview, rather than any difference in political positions, where it was very unlikely that I would threaten their stance. This links in with the construction of my role as researcher and is explored further in Section 6.6. However, the fact that participants became 'engaged' was perhaps reflected by two asking if they could have copies of the interview transcripts, because they thought the questions had prompted them to enunciate ideas they had not previously thought about (I declined at that stage on the grounds that it was not usual to part with 'raw' evidence which had not been interpreted through the research process). Perhaps more tellingly, on two occasions when I discovered the tape recorder had not been working properly, I was able to negotiate second interviews with busy CEOs without difficulty.[161]

However, in spite of my attempts to maximise honesty and openness, I was faced with choices that had to be made about comments and empirical illustrations that have become part of the construction of my research narrative: my choices and constructions of the data are necessarily value-laden. Similarly, participants may have felt themselves subjected to what they imagined to be research 'norms' or requirements; although, in the case of the focus group, I believe that the familiarity of working in the group, and the challenges that came from within the group itself, may have minimised this. In addition, I believe that the discursive, dialectical approach, where all views were considered and reflected upon, helped to minimise any 'playing the game' or obstructive opposition that might have operated.

[161] One of these participants offered a level of auto-critique: he felt he had not interviewed as well the second time, indicating some reflection on the issues discussed, or even a consequent reduction of assurance on some points and a level of emancipation.

6.6 My Role as Researcher

All of the above affected and reflected the construction of my role as researcher. This was already constructed at the macro-level by the theoretical decisions taken. However, as indicated above, the nature of the research called for special care in that construction: there was potentially much to be lost in terms of important research relationships with a wide span of people. One clear issue to address was the ethical dimension of the research with the participants themselves, including the returns that they could expect from the research and the commitment they were making to my programme. I considered it important to stress that ethical contractual arrangements have implications for researcher and participants, although the latter clearly have choices about whether they enter into this two-way contract. Another issue was to be aware that the goal of 'emancipation' has within it a normative agenda to 'influence' and 'change' people; and also that there is a difference between 'emancipation' and 'exploitation'. Central to that point is a key issue of this research: that of democratic choice as opposed to asymmetric power relations. The role I aspired to was of Gramsci's 'organic intellectual' (see Chapter One, and Cammett, 1967; Gramsci, 1995), or Giroux's 'transformative intellectual' (1988): it was a role akin to 'honest broker', and one built upon an exploratory partnership: 'What shall we learn together on this journey?'

The awareness of what I 'wanted' to hear has been mentioned. Another important issue was to be aware of the ways in which I expressed myself: the language of Critical Theory, for example, (like that of sustainable development), can be adapted to a style of discourse that is familiar to participants without losing the essence of the concepts. Adapting the language was not an act of arrogance or patronisation, but a way of improving communication and avoiding what might have appeared as an élitist or authoritarian stance, which would have been a way of holding asymmetric power that confounded the ideals of the research.[162] This also raised the concept of 'false consciousness', a construction that is notably problematic, and a reminder that another's 'truth' should not become my 'false consciousness'. What I attempted to

[162] It also became possible as the research process developed to introduce some terms from the theory, which, in some cases, the participants also picked up, such as 'agency'.

do was to open up or emancipate alternative meanings of ideas, liberating a wider choice of alternatives that participants could consider, choose or reject without authoritarian judgement on my part. As a simple example, it was necessary to bring hard-working environmental managers to an awareness that the best environmental management system still does not fully reflect the concept of sustainable development, although it is an important way of moving business towards the goal. A harder one was to introduce the idea that capitalist globalisation benefits the few but denies basic justice to the many, especially as 'social justice' aspects did not readily feature in their conceptions of sustainable development. One key issue was to look at practices that arise from the ideas and material structures of companies that support 'false' understandings (Sayer, 1984), an example being the claims associated with the practices of eco-modernisation, which companies find taxing enough to implement. At the same time, it was important for me to keep in mind Sayer's point that the constructions produced by Critical Theory may themselves appear false – 'an affront to common-sense' (Sayer, 1984:43); and a reaction against the way in which the research model 'disturbed' taken-for-granted assumptions is recorded in Chapter Seven.

One important aspect of research relationships that I have kept until last is the key issue of gender. I had needed to take into account the fact that I was a white, British (although also a New Zealander), female researcher working chiefly with men who had some power, and possibly some opinions about researchers and females, if not about 'Britishness'. I believe the way I prepared for and dealt with such issues ties in closely with the management of social and political relations already discussed. In my favour, I believe, was the fact that these managers nearly all knew me: they already understood that, while quiet in demeanour, I was tough, not easily distracted, and had a sense of humour that was often a saving-grace. Another advantage I had was my age – older than nearly all of the participants, which I think lent 'gravitas' to my situation, so that I had none of the problems of 'flirting' and 'patronage' that Schoenberger comments on, but did appear to find myself, as she did, 'one of them'. Such issues of power and identity are taken into account in the interpretation of the narrative. An interesting aspect of the research was the number of times that participants commented that I 'asked hard questions', which meant that I was making them think about issues not previously considered, and which they had reflected on

between meetings. Even taking account of the possibility of participants 'giving the researcher what she wants', this perhaps indicated, as Schoenberger also notes (1991:217), that a 'tough' woman researcher may have an advantage over her male colleagues in terms of how trenchant her sensitive and supportive questioning can be.

The important outcome of these deliberations was the research goal to reduce asymmetry between researcher, participants, and, ultimately, the reader. This was important in the consideration of workplace politics and the political sub-text of what took place in the interviews, and which was highlighted by making the focus group interviews context-specific. Work settings are imbued with 'ground power' that affects talk, documentation, the artefacts and atmosphere of the institution and my role within it as researcher. Occasionally it appeared that the operation of such power created tensions for the research: not only what people could or could not say, but whether or not I could interview the CEO; or, if I could, whether or not others had to be present as well, and what that presence implied. One thing that emerged early on, in an institutional sense, was the potential of my role either to exacerbate or reduce tension in the workplace. For example, on two occasions, the CEO wanted to meet me, ostensibly to talk about 'sustainable development', but really, I sensed, to see what my 'take' on the company was, and whether I was likely to denounce them in some way. The nature of the research meant 'getting involved', but without dominating the dialectical process; and engaging in 'real' conversations that modelled openness, and that '... make[s] the interview more honest, morally sound and reliable, because it treats the respondent as an equal, allows him or her to express personal feelings, and therefore presents a more "realistic" picture than can be uncovered using traditional interview methods' (Fontana and Frey, 1994:371).

6.7 Concluding Comments

This account of my methodology reveals the complexity that is brought to a research situation by a theorisation based in Critical Theory, as well as the richness of potential such a theorisation provides. It makes it possible, indeed, vital, to engage participants in the research; and it means that 'control' over the research is based upon being prepared to go with a process that may have unanticipated but valuable

outcomes. The challenges presented and the 'political' nature of the research also created and maintained a 'tension' which engaged and held my own interest in and commitment to the research; and I believe that a similar engagement was experienced by participants. I had sought an approach and chosen goals that would take me beyond the perpetuation of 'political sustainability' in my work. I wished to engage participants at a more fundamental level of values (and politics) that transcended the ways in which companies pursued improved eco-efficiency, although that project was acknowledged as important. This challenged participants. They would, initially, have liked to talk about environmental management systems; and, indeed, they sometimes did focus on management issues even though the questions asked called for conceptual issues to be explored. The ongoing and intensive nature of the research with corporate managers meant that what was initially unearthed did not become 'fixed': it was not their last word on the subject. The intensity of repeated employment of the corporate interview and the research relationship it prompted meant that we could move towards the exploration of conceptual and even counter-hegemonic issues.

It is, perhaps, only on reflection, as I write up the research evidence and evaluate the methods used, that I come to appreciate the complexity of the research situations created and the 'richness' of the evidence, as well as some 'gaps' and some opportunities missed. The Critical Theory focus on what makes things the way they are – the lenses through which issues of domination, asymmetric power and emancipation can be viewed – deepened the original purposes and the outcomes of the research. Foucauldian perspectives brought a 'critical' distance which meant that different political or values positions did not become obstacles to communication, but the subject of the discourse: it provided a different conception of issues of 'power' and 'judgement'. It was interesting to observe how the discursive process of the research ran counter to the process of 'appropriation' which the evidence suggests characterises the sustainable development debate in New Zealand at present. The research methodology was designed to open up questions, as opposed to answering them, and to introduce a level of discursivity and emancipatory praxis. The fact that participants responded to this discursive process suggests that what is needed at the national level is a more open, inclusive discourse that would inform policy and action in more democratic ways. The approach taken also means that the

research study, as presented in my thesis, is not complete. There are commitments to be honoured in terms of sharing the research outcomes and building upon these; and emergent themes from the research story still to be explored. My belief is that the methods described in this chapter have worked in such a way that the 'research journey' can be continued; and that this study provides the platform for future intensive research. The implications of the study for ongoing research are returned to in Chapter Ten.

Chapter Seven

Narratives of Sustainable Development: Constructing Eco-modernism

> Corporate environmentalism is, in the end, notable for the threads of both sincerity and cynicism that wind through its tangled patterns. Compared to corporate anti-environmental activism, it is a token of rationality and hope. Yet corporate environmentalism also offers a misleading win-win fantasy of environmental protection in which tough choices will not be necessary.
>
> Athanasiou, T. (1998) *Slow Reckoning: The Ecology of a Divided Planet.*

7.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the analysis of conceptions of sustainable development emerging from the spoken and written accounts that form the empirical core of the research and the narratives constructed from this evidence. The data are drawn from the semi-structured group interviews; the semi-structured individual interviews with managers and CEOs in this group; interviews with key informants from the socio-political context of business in New Zealand; and from the written accounts produced by these two key participant groups.[163] The interview schedule that was developed from the major research questions and the 'weak-strong' heuristic included follow-up questions and prompts to probe and tease out the themes from the research matrix.[164] The core group meetings, based on more complex interaction, provided the opportunity to extend the research explorations and to draw out some emergent themes that arose early in the research inquiry, as well as 'silences' around issues highlighted in the epistemological framework. Consequently, managers attempted to assess their own company's stance on the 'weak-strong' continuum, and the reasons for this; to explore the relationship between the growth paradigm and sustainability issues; to reflect on the exercise of power in corporations and how this

[163] The composition and details of the Core Group of managers, with coding for job titles and the industry sector for their companies, is provided in Appendix 4. A full schedule of interviewees from the social context is provided in Appendix 5; and the publicly available documents analysed are listed in Appendix 6. Core Group Managers are referred to throughout the empirical chapters by the initials of their job title and industry sector; members of the context group are referred to by the initials of their organisation; and documents are referred to by their source and the title of the document.

[164] See Appendix 2.

might influence the shift to sustainable development; and to engage in discussion of their own conceptions of 'the good life' and the potential or otherwise for their roles as change-agents. These extended explorations provide insights that are considered here and in Chapter Eight; but are drawn upon chiefly in Chapter Nine, where tensions between individual and corporate perspectives emerge. However, the scope of the thesis means that these will chiefly form the basis for ongoing research explorations.

The themes of the three chapters that interpret the evidence from the empirical research (Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine) are tightly associated. The focus of Chapter Seven is to consider the extent to which the narrative of sustainable development in New Zealand can be described as 'eco-modernist' in construction. Section 7.2 introduces the 'weak' construction of sustainable development that generally informs the New Zealand narrative. Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2 unpick an important barrier to the discourse: the struggle over definition that is taking place and the associated, possibly obfuscatory, discourse of 'confusion'. I argue that this powerful narrative of 'unknowing and confusion' plays an important role in constraining the discourse to one of eco-modernism, particularly in view of the general lack of inclusivity and discursivity that characterises the New Zealand debate: it produces a 'hidden' or 'null' curriculum that disempowers people.[165] Section 7.3 examines in more detail the generally 'weak' construction that underpins conceptions of sustainable development, and demonstrates the extent to which this 'weak' discourse is already legitimating the eco-modernist 'business case'[166] for sustainable development. This provides the basis for the exploration in Chapter Eight of the role of 'management' and institutional coalitions in appropriating sustainable development. Chapter Nine explores evidence of an emerging 'critical' discourse based upon 'stronger' conceptions of sustainable development, and considers the potential emergence of a 'site of political contest' and more progressive agency. Evidence of a level of reflexivity developing within the research and the implications of this are also discussed.

[165] Chapter One introduced the impacts of 'hidden' and 'null' curricula on disempowerment.

[166] Throughout this part of the thesis, 'the business case' will signify the business case for sustainable development that focuses on eco-efficiency and constructs eco-modernism.

7.2 Constructing Sustainable Development

In a number of ways, sustainable development is an underdeveloped discourse in New Zealand. There is, as yet, no national Sustainable Development Strategy, and participatory discourse involving the public has been promised but not delivered. This in itself creates a space for the discourse to become strongly contested by those who have a stake in sustainable development, while disempowering others from influencing the debate. A struggle has emerged between two major groups with vested interests in 'controlling' the narrative: those who wish to capture the concept to make 'the business case' for 'green orthodoxy'; and those representing mainstream conservative business organisations who would hobble the concept.[167] It is treated in this Chapter as a struggle positioned within the heart of the business paradigm, clearly signifying the threat to capitalism that the radical and normative conception of sustainable development constitutes. The result is that the dominant but contested narrative emerging from the research is chiefly positioned within the 'weak' construction of 'ecological modernisation'.[168] It represents a 'corporate' narrative of sustainable development that centres on eco-efficiency at best and is now getting mileage out of conducting 'business-as-usual *with a heart'*. It relies on utilitarian approaches, technological and scientific solutions and eco-efficiency measures that arrogate control of the sustainable development discourse to 'experts'. The more radical social/eco-justice agenda is generally suppressed, although not without some lip-service; and challenges for change at structural and institutional levels rarely form part of the narrative. 'Sustainable development' is reconfigured as 'sustainable growth'. However, as discussed in Chapter Ten, the position adopted in the thesis is not to dismiss this project as being without value or to brand those who construct the business case as deliberately exercising hegemonic power over the discourse for their own purposes. These groups are also subject to structural and institutional norms that are more powerful than themselves; and the eco-modernist approaches they promote may have a constitutive role in the longer term that none of

[167] These include the New Zealand Business Roundtable (NZBR, established in 1986 as a driver of the neo-liberal policies of the government of the day); Business New Zealand (BusinessNZ, formerly the Employers' Association and the Manufacturers' Federation); and Chambers of Commerce.

[168] See Chapters Three, Four and Five.

us can currently predict, one possibility being their acting as a catalyst for a more emancipatory discourse through the emerging contestation of the business case.

7.2.1 The Problem of Definition

The very act of contestation for definition of sustainable development underlines the concept's intrinsically political potential for change. Power of definition is seminal to dominating what 'meaning', and therefore policy and action, shall be. Meta-concepts based on ethical and values issues are generally evasive of tight definition, and the 'problem' that was widely identified in the research was the difficulty of pinning down what such a complex construct *means*. The struggle for definition fell into two camps: firstly, attempts to control definition of the concept, with a preference for more pragmatic 'business definitions'; and, secondly, the associated allegations of 'confusion', and thereby the 'redundancy' of the concept that are examined in Section 7.2.2. Both positions safeguard the hegemony of the capitalist paradigm, the 'business case' being the cosmeticised mirror-image of the mainstream position. I argue, therefore, that the 'confusion' that surrounds the concept in New Zealand is partly manufactured, but also attributable to the general dearth of inclusive discourse on sustainable development.[169] The ensuing 'difficulties' of understanding become constructed as 'reason' for not involving the public in the discourse, which is a fundamentally undemocratic decision. It seems there is a danger of 'experts' spending more time claiming the 'person in the street' will not be able to comprehend the concept than they do in testing that assumption or fostering understanding through dialectical, democratic participatory approaches.[170] People remain disempowered where there is a null or hidden curriculum operating in education, business or society (Chapter One). It also goes against all of the international evidence of people at 'grassroots' level, and the social movements they drive, being more than able to comprehend what sustainable development means to them and what unsustainability has done to their lives. The construction of a

[169] This lack of discourse is also commented on by PRISM/Knight (2000); Knight (personal communication, 2002); and the Report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE, 2002b).

[170] The NZBCSD, LGNZ and the PCE Report, as well as corporate managers, advanced this as a reason not to use the Brundtland definition.

'narrative of difficulty' becomes an effective way of 'silencing' the alternative, radical and empowering narratives that might emerge from greater discursivity and the examination of institutional roles in creating the problem.

The definition that is most commonly adhered to in New Zealand is that of the Brundtland Report:

> '... meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' (WCED, 1987).

This underpins both government and corporate accounts,[171] although it tends to be subjected to 'simpler' definitions. While direct quotation, references to or 'echoes' of the Brundtland language support this as the foundation statement of sustainable development, at no point have I found its core themes or principles and their implications identified or problematised. However, the Brundtland definition is ideologically contested by the mainstream business opposition where it is dismissed as 'hopelessly problematical' (New Zealand Business Roundtable/NZBR, 2002).[172] The Report's purported role in giving impetus to eco-modernism has been discussed (Chapters Three and Five), and its definition is chiefly employed to support that project in New Zealand. However, the *radical core themes* of sustainable development that emerge from the Brundtland Report (Jacobs, 1991; and Chapter Three) may be perceived as implicit in the language and principles adopted by the government, for example, in its 'Key Goals'.[173] While adoption of these principles

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[171] For example, MfE, 2001; PM's Speech, 2001; Government Report on SD, 2002; PCE, 2002b; MED, 2001, 2002; MFAT, 2002.

[172] Chapter Three examined the problematisation in the international literature, including the conclusion that sustainable development had reached a 'conceptual dead-end' (Sneddon, 2000); although those contestations arose from a different ideological perspective that was pro-nature and pro-equity, rather than pro-business.

[173] The New Zealand Government's platform upon which is was re-elected in 2002 is summarised as:

- Strengthen national identity and uphold the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi;
- Grow an inclusive economy for the benefit of all;
- Restore trust in government and provide strong social services;
- Improve New Zealanders' skills;
- Protect and enhance the environment (PM's Speech, June 2001).

The Government's Approach to Sustainable Development (2002) encapsulates SD as:

- Looking after people;
- Taking a long-term view;
- Taking into account effects on social, cultural, economic and environmental dimensions; and
- Participation and partnerships (Government Report on Sustainable Development, 2002).

into the political mainstream carries the threat of capture as another 'excuse' for economic growth,[174] there also arose in the research clear evidence of a political and ideological backlash from some sectors of business against the (allegedly) socialist government of the day and its support for sustainable development, however mild.

To some extent, the nature of a participant's education and the work they were involved in determined their understanding of the Brundtland definition. A former lawyer, educated in environmental law, now working as a corporate director, understood the Brundtland definition as 'very broad; from the earliest enunciations of Brundtland ... it was intended to have very wide application', and talked about the social focus of the Report. A manager from Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) provided a rare acknowledgement that the democratic concept calls for 'process', 'empowerment' and 'inclusivity' in the discourse:

> 'and it's about process that empowers participation at the community level so that there is understanding and ownership.' (LGNZ, 2002).

At quasi-government level (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment/PCE, 2002b), in business organisations (Business New Zealand/BusinessNZ; NZBR) and other contextual groups (Council of Trade Unions/CTU, 2002), and within the written and spoken corporate discourse, it is the Brundtland definition that is referred to, although its interpretation is rarely made clear beyond some paraphrasing, while its radical aspects are generally overlooked or ignored. Only one participant, from a union organisation, problematised the Brundtland definition within the context of political economy, picking up the implications for institutional and structural arrangements and focusing on the social implications of the concept:

> 'And the other key concept is that it's a balance thing when applied to any ... political economy.' (CTU).

The acceptance of the Brundtland definition, however it is interpreted, is opposed by dissent from the conservative mainstream (see above); and by the main organisation supporting 'the business case' for sustainable development in New Zealand. The New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development (NZBCSD), following its parent body, the WBCSD, has rejected use of the Brundtland definition on

[174] O'Brien (1991).

account of its being 'hard to put into practice' and to 'communicate to the general public'.[175] By and large, the NZBCSD communicates with fewer than fifty corporate members as opposed to the 'general public'; and Chapter Five revealed that the radical agenda of the Brundtland Report is not what its parent body, the WBCSD, was set up to 'put into practice'. Neither organisation is noted for fostering inclusive and democratic discourse with the general public. The NZBCSD, following the Labour-coalition government that it seeks to influence, has opted for the no more specific paraphrase of Brundtland used by the UK government:

> 'Sustainable development is about ensuring a better quality of life for everyone now and in generations to come.'[176]

The claim is that the 'quality of life' focus makes the concept more 'aspirational'; and it 'changes the *tone and content*' (emphasis added) of the sustainable development debate so that emphasis is more upon 'solutions' than 'problems', which maintains the managerialist focus. A possible interpretation of this is that the 'aspirational' focus provides a less contestable basis for the increased economic growth and higher standards of living that the NZBCSD/WBCSD promote.[177] The concern about this change of emphasis is that it dilutes the Brundtland focus on 'need' and 'limits' to one that suggests everyone will be better off under the traditional 'growth' paradigm, contrary to the evidence of history. The linguistic turn also signals the decision to move from the focus on 'standard of living' that has received much criticism of late to 'quality of life', with the consequent threat of another semantic capture to a 'growth-determined' conception of 'quality'.

The corporate managers found the Brundtland definition vague and difficult to understand, and had had no previous opportunities to problematise the concept. In some cases, they had been introduced to it as 'complex' and 'difficult', one way of preventing discursivity being to convince people that they cannot understand a concept. Some effort was made by participants to clarify the concept, especially if this could be brought into line with the growth paradigm within which they work:

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[175] www.nzbcsd.org.nz/definition.asp: *'Dedicated to Making a Difference'*.

[176] UK Government White Paper: *'A Better Quality of Life: A Strategy for Sustainable Development in the UK'*, 1999.

[177] See Chapter Eight.

> 'I like the word 'development' in the concept, because it gives us a dynamic, a momentum; whereas 'sustainable management' ... seems a bit more static.' (SP, Manufacturing).

The act of appropriation takes place to a large extent through the language that is promoted or silenced; and, by the time the interviews were conducted, the language of the Brundtland Report had already been strongly contested by the metaphors and language of the 'business case', and something of a semantic and ontological struggle for meaning was already being played out in participants' responses. There is some evidence that the key business metaphors are beginning to 'silence' the original discourse of sustainable development and its radical social themes with a language that is openly based on the taken-for-granted growth paradigm. At government and corporate levels, the indications are that the language of sustainable development and that of management have become conflated, providing a potent re-storying of the once-radical environmental narrative. The conception of sustainable development emerged in their discourse as business- and government-as-usual, promoting 'growth with a human face'.

For example, the managerial rationality of the 'triple bottom line' ('TBL') pervades government, quasi-government and corporate written accounts[178] and was central to the discourse in the interviews. It is not employed without a degree of scepticism – ('we need to get past the jargon and the brands', LGNZ) – a reference to the fact that this was one way that sustainable development had been 'colonised' by proponents of 'the business case' who 'self-promote' around the TBL (LGNZ). A union representative endorsed this scepticism while commenting on the propensity for business organisations to leave stakeholders such as unions out of the debate:

> 'We're suspicious at times, I have to say, because the history ... is that some of these companies *self-promote* around it ... and also we [unions] can often be left out as a stakeholder' (CTU).

The term has largely replaced discussion of the *principles* of sustainable development in favour of a *'formula'* for full-cost accounting, firmly located in the managerial language of business and accountancy. An example of the traction it has

[178] It may, at the same time, be a metaphor that has a 'reflexive quality' that can change perspectives in a given context, for example, by illuminating the cognitive barriers of the traditional financial bottom line (Hajer, 1995).

gained in the forming of hegemonic, hierarchical coalitions was its adoption as the title and therefore signifier for the Ministry for the Environment's 'Triple Bottom Line Project',[179] supported jointly by the Ministry and the NZBCSD, aimed at '*measuring* and *assessing* the contribution of different parts of society to the achievement of sustainable development *goals*' (MfE, 'New Zealand Sustainable Development Strategy', 2001, emphasis added).[180] This adherence to the management paradigm in the discourse of sustainable development is explored further in Chapter Eight.

At the same time, signals have emerged that organisations are becoming wary of the TBL concept, possibly as the result of some problematisation and critique.[181] For example, a level of discursive struggle is identified even within the coalition just referred to. The NZBCSD, following the WBCSD, has renounced usage of TBL for its corporate reporting project in favour of 'sustainable development reporting' (SDR),[182] although the Ministry for the Environment continues to promote its usage. The semantic shift by the Council does not seem to have halted its corporate members' usage of the 'TBL' rhetoric, several of whom have produced 'TBL' as opposed to SDR reports. Nor has the change of focus and shift in language taken place without contestation from corporate members who have reacted against the dearth of democratic process in making this decision. One participant pointed out that his company might have moved, with some difficulty, towards 'TBL', but they were still a long way from sustainable development, providing an interesting example of reflexivity:

> ' ... the Business Council [because of the BC trends globally] wants us to call it a 'sustainability' (*sic*) report, and we say that it's definitely *not* a sustainability report. But, yes, it is a TBL report.' (EC, Retailing).

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[179] This was cited in government documents as a 'major project' (Prime Minister's Speech, 9 July, 2001: Proposal for New Zealand Sustainable Development Strategy, 2001).

[180] www.mfe.govt.nz

[181] Mayhew, 1998; Gray and Milne, 2002.

[182] When the genealogy of the MfE/NZBCSD coalition is examined, it reveals that the term 'TBL' has been more consistently promoted by the Ministry, while the Council has followed the WBCSD in referring to Sustainable Development Reporting. For example, the Ministry has used the term 'triple bottom line' for its Report on its own performance (2003); and for an industry guide to 'Your Business and the TBL' (2003).

Another pervasive term in the language of the business case is the 'three pillars' metaphor of the WBCSD. Linguistically and symbolically (with its 'Greek temple' logo) this anachronism is replete with the ontology of power and authority. These different languages of sustainable development, conflated within the business case discourse, led to at least one confused response which signalled a genuine struggle taking place to shape comprehension from the conflicting metaphors:

> 'I was just wondering about the *triple bottom line* definition as linked to sustainable development ... there's *these three pillars* ... of social, environmental and economic; and ... it's a good way for me to conceptualise it – because I can see *the pillars*, I can see the top of *the pyramid* ...' (EA, Manufacturing, emphasis added).

This appears to negate any suggestion that the 'business' language makes the concept of sustainable development easier to understand than the 'opaque' Brundtland definition. The point here is not to refute linguistic attempts to clarify the concept but to examine hegemonic appropriation of the agenda through language and to make a claim for more discursive approaches and the employment of language that speaks in an authentic way to the greatest number of people.[183] The significance of the conflation of the language of eco-modernisation and 'the business case' with that of sustainable development and the implications for the hegemonic appropriation of the concept are returned to in the Conclusion to this Chapter and in Chapter Eight.

The struggle over 'definition' within the discursive power pyramid seems to have done little to promote the conceptual grasp of sustainable development. It has, however, staked out who currently seeks power over the concept. It reflects the process of appropriation in action, whether wittingly performed or not (although the documents from the major parties appear to constitute a staunch claim to 'leadership' in the area). The implications of this discursive formation for the government and its own role in promoting the language of eco-modernism are examined in Chapter Eight. A comment on the 'usefulness' of competing for definition of sustainable development, was provided by one of the research participants:

[183] For an example of an inclusive way of talking with people about sustainable development in their own terms, see the discussion of Knight's work with communities (Chapter Nine).

> ' ... none of those definitions is that helpful when you're looking at it from a practical point of view. But that's not really ... the aim of those definitions, anyway. They're really aimed at *providing the conceptual context.*'
>
> (PRISM/Knight, emphasis added).

The 'conceptual context', with its implications for discursive conceptualisation of sustainable development, is more rarely addressed than the powerful contest for language.

7.2.2 Constructing 'Confusion'

It appears that another obstacle to understanding sustainable development and to its becoming central to the discourse in New Zealand is the 'narrative of confusion' that is being constructed, possibly as an obfuscatory device. The sheer difficulty of comprehending a concept as complex as sustainable development is, of course, a real part of the problem. The contestation of the concept, examined in Chapter Three, makes it unsurprising that similar difficulties with the term's 'opacity' should be encountered in New Zealand. For some, the sheer 'problem' of confusion was a barrier to be overcome, especially if their role was to clarify this at local government level and to business and the community:

> '... the language itself ... the jargon of sustainable development is probably its biggest problem. If we can ... entrench understanding with the language of the street, then we start to make progress. *We got confused by its permutations.*' (LGNZ, emphasis added).

The research revealed that participants believed a number of 'permutations' signified much the same as sustainable development.[184] Some of the confusion was attributed to the 'effects-based' legislation of the Resource Management Act (RMA, 1991) [185] with its focus on 'sustainable management'. People in central and local government

[184] Terms used almost synonymously included 'ecologically sustainable development'; 'sustainability'; 'sustainable management'; 'sustainable growth' as well as the business terms, 'eco-efficiency'; 'TBL'; and 'the three pillars'.

[185] During the course of the research, the central anomaly of the RMA's focus on 'sustainable management' rather than 'sustainable development' was attributed to the neo-liberal free-market paradigm that had seized New Zealand during the period that the Bill was developed (LGNZ; Young, 2001). In the introduction to the NZBR's 'Misguided Virtue' (Henderson, 2001), the Vice Chairman states that the 'framers' of the RMA were 'careful to speak of the concept of sustainable management, not the *looser and ill-defined concept of sustainable development*' (emphasis added); but does not explain what were the *influences* brought to bear on the 'framers'.

now acknowledge the difficulties this has caused, especially as it has been taken by some as New Zealand's 'authoritative' statement on sustainable development. It is the legislation that most keenly impacts on the work of the managers interviewed, and the ensuing semantic confusion between sustainable development and sustainable management - ('I think the two terms are used almost interchangeably', CM, Oil Company) - was a stated difficulty:

> 'New Zealand in the mid-90s seemed to go through a bit of debate on 'sustainable development' versus the RMA wording of 'sustainable management' ... Are we talking semantics ... or is there something fundamentally different from the RMA structure?' (SP, Manufacturing).

The preference for the somewhat easier-to-comprehend, resource-oriented 'sustainable management' also bases the complex and holistic concept of sustainable development within the safer, more controllable confines of the *maneggiare* paradigm with which companies and government departments in New Zealand feel relatively comfortable. It arrogates to management the privilege of determining what management techniques will be employed, and it means that companies can largely rely upon their performance under the RMA and the process of compliance and consent to claim to be 'sustainable'. This 'confusion' and the 'opacity' of sustainable development help to explain the ready adoption of the business case language by managers. The focus on 'sustainable *development*' in the interviews unearthed some frustration with the term, and reluctance to problematise its meaning. There was eagerness to accept the business language and metaphors that appeared more 'practical' and easy of definition – the triple bottom line approach was perceived as 'a useful way of breaking it down into *measurable* chunks,' (DSM, Water Utility). A discursive approach to the concept, drawing out people's understandings, also had its impacts: in one case a kind of 'gestalt' experience for a person recognised as something of an authority on sustainable development: '... it's actually quite hard to answer ... I've never been asked it directly like that,' (CDL); while an environmental manager dismissed contestation in favour of 'management' of the concept by business. This was possibly a reaction against the interview process itself and its interruption of routinised and 'pragmatic' ways of seeing things:

> '... to worry about the definitions is something we just don't have the luxury for. We know what it is; and what it is, is a constantly moving field of what you can negotiate and what the pressures are on the day and on the year ...' (EM, Primary Production).[186]

However, the 'narrative of confusion' that is under construction goes beyond basic difficulty of comprehension or contestation of terminology: there appears to be an obfuscatory discourse emerging, constructed by more right-wing business groups. This has apparently intensified since the 'business case' has been promulgated in New Zealand. The Executive Director of the neo-liberal NZBR suggested that the 'lack of rigorous definition' of sustainable development was reason to cease using the term, unless it could be 'translated into something more meaningful'. Further potential disempowerment of the concept came with the claim that the current business model actually made sustainable development a redundant concept: 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future ... *is a reality now,*' (NZBR, emphasis added). Others from the conservative hub of business ridiculed any discursive dimension of the concept:

> '...it's extraordinary what is being said right at the moment in the name of sustainable development. *Some of it is just ludicrous.*' (BusinessNZ, emphasis added).

Precise definition was demanded by this group; but also, it seemed, one that fitted business-as-usual, in which case, the concept and the definition again became redundant and could be dismissed. Overall, it emerged that mainstream business would prefer to dispense with the term altogether, unless it could be tightly and specifically defined. The much preferred term was 'sustainability' (BusinessNZ), although that was not problematised either; nor was it recognised as another term that is at least as resistant to simple definition as is sustainable development (Chapter Three). 'Sustainability' appeared to be favoured because it could be understood as fitting the business paradigm of 'viability', 'being sustainable for the long term', complementing the paradigm of growth, and supposedly being 'more comprehensible':

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[186] In fact, the participants had not been asked to 'define' sustainable development but to discuss what they understood to be its core themes: what it was 'about'; what they 'understood' by it.

> 'we ... would prefer to use the word 'sustainability' because we're very concerned about *exactly that* ... what ... the business community really wants [is] an explanation and a definition of *exactly what it* [sustainable development] *is*.' (BusinessNZ, emphasis added).

A language of 'confusion' was constructed within this sub-sample. Its own language focused on 'sensible' interpretations that were 'verifiable', had 'rigour', and were 'testable', 'logical' and 'evidence-based'. The languages of sustainable development *and* of the 'business case' were both deemed 'slippery' if not 'downright dangerous', and 'hopelessly problematical'. The repression of any strong conception of sustainable development also employed the semiotic device of disempowerment through ridicule, identifying 'pejorative' aspects which were associated with an element of 'religion': 'environmental religion', 'prophets of sustainable development', 'the religion of the new millenium', 'environmental hell', and 'the industry of the art of Armageddon'.

The 'confusion' was presented as a struggle between business, as represented by its own chosen 'experts'[187] on sustainable development who adopted 'sensible' approaches to resource use because 'more value' might attach to such things in the future; and those who were misguided, if not zealots, who advanced foolish and dangerous notions. An 'alternative' model of sustainable development was advanced that was indistinguishable from the dominant paradigm of business. This was based on the contention that 'the most important endowment we can pass on to future generations is *capital stock, level of technology and those things that make for a better quality of life for them in material and environmental terms,*' (NZBR, emphasis added). Concern about resource scarcity was deemed a legitimate issue, because of the increased costs to business of accessing materials; while 'wise management' would ensure that resource depletion was controlled. The position replicates the 'rationality' of the capitalist means of production and consumption; it overlooks the ir-rationality of environmental externalities created by a model that has led companies to deplete resources or, latterly, to conserve them chiefly for their profit-value.[188] At the same time, the intention is to take the higher moral ground for

[187] The right-wing American business front group, the Cato Institute and Lomborg's 'The Skeptical Environmentalist' (2001) were promoted as making a case for 'sound science' by this group.

[188] Chapter Three and Chapter Five noted that resources have now become *valued* by business, not for their intrinsic value, but because of their increasing *scarcity* value and higher cost.

both social and environmental issues – one example being the argument that it is unethical to deny present generations their access to resources when future generations will be *'far, far better off'* than people are today (NZBR, 2002).[189] My conclusion is that, beneath the rhetoric of the mainstream organisations, there exists a very real understanding of the radical core of sustainable development, though this is presented as sinister or naïve. For example, the Executive Director of the NZBR, although in denial, provided one of the better accounts of sustainable development:

> 'Some people will tell you that sustainable management means something different than sustainable development. Sustainable development is supposed to *be broader and include notions of international social justice and world poverty and that kind of thing.*' (NZBR, emphasis added).

Interestingly, this participant was concerned about the 'lack of engagement or lack of discussion on the *critical central issues'*; but the call for more discourse did not seem to include questions about what these 'central' issues were, who would determine that they were the critical ones, or who would be involved in this discourse. The story constructed by powerful business groups of 'confusion', denial, even redundancy, exercises asymmetric power over the concept and the discourse, especially where the public discourse is not well-developed. It directly opposes what lies at the heart of radical sustainable development, which they do not wish to be problematised: the contested role of economic growth and the radically different form of economics that sustainable development calls for. 'Socially equitable and benign growth'[190] requires fundamental change to patterns of production and consumption, and this questions the economic structures that the conservative business organisations are set up to protect. It represents the antithesis of what the NZBR was established to promote in the days of neo-liberalism, when New Zealand's political and economic goal was to be 'more Thatcher than Thatcher'. The NZBR itself has named its devil (Henderson, 2001) by opposing what it identifies as the 'radical doctrine' of corporate social responsibility, seen as 'hostile' to capitalism and the market economy, and promoted by groups who want to see 'a new model for capitalism' (Henderson, op. cit., p. 7). As the reactions to some of the interview

[189] Beckerman (1994, 1996, 1999) casts doubt on the 'morality' of depriving today's populations of resources in order to provide for a future where actual 'needs' are currently uncertain.

[190] Sachs, 1999; and see Chapter Three.

questions also reveal, raising issues of social disparity and the role of business in creating and perpetuating these, or any questioning of the political economy or economic policies, quickly presses the 'red alarm' button[191] and releases fears that a 'totalitarian' model is being proposed. Such questions, that probe to the heart of economic development and whether it has done enough to even out such disparities, interrupt the assumptions of the status quo: they are not permitted. However, there is a certain irony in the fact that the NZBR now finds itself championing 'environmental responsibility' (within limits) in default of a discourse of sustainable development: a constitutive outcome of the sustainable development discourse that had not, perhaps, been anticipated.[192] The importance of teasing out the construction of this narrative of confusion is that it focuses the discourse on the fundamental dichotomy of sustainable development – 'ecology and people' versus 'economic growth' – and prepares the way for the examination of the weak, eco-modernist narrative of the 'the business case' that is presented in Section 7.3.

7.3 Eco-modernism: Legitimising 'The Business Case'

In this section, I discuss the conceptions of sustainable development that arose chiefly from the interaction of the interviews and examine these against the 'weak-strong' continuum. This reinforces that the dominant narrative in New Zealand is a positivist, utilitarian discourse of 'weak' sustainable development. The preceding section of this chapter indicated the nature of the discourse. The contestation for definition and the narrative of confusion represent, not a struggle to problematise or 'get to the heart' of sustainable development, but an attempt, however unwitting in some cases, to disempower the radical core of the concept that highlights the role of business in creating the problematic. The result is to avert any discussion of change to the dominant paradigm. On the one hand, it over-simplifies the concept to something hardly recognisable as sustainable development; and, on the other,

[191] One CEO, asked if he thought we could move towards sustainable development within our current social and economic arrangements retorted: 'You're talking revolution!'; and another asked, 'Well, is there any alternative to capitalism? Well, is there?' and proceeded to describe the environmental damage discovered in former communist countries.

[192] Foucault (1973; 1977); Hajer (1995); and Harvey (1996) argue that discourses are constitutive and cannot be controlled.

castigates it as the production of 'crackpots' (NZBR, 2002) and redundant. The contestation is between two strands of the same hegemony, both located in the capitalist model. When critical social issues were raised with corporate managers or participants from the broader context, usually after prompting, the discourse was difficult to maintain and generally circled back to the safer and more familiar territory of environmental issues and compliance, or faded out. For some participants, this may have reflected their own confusion or unfamiliarity with the issues; for others it demonstrated adroitness in avoiding issues that did not reinforce the capitalist business paradigm.

In the remainder of this Chapter, I set out to unravel the components of the 'weak' model; the reasons for its being subscribed to; and the influences that are shaping the narrative. I further examine the hegemonic struggle between conservative, right-wing positions and 'the business case', since both impact on the perceptions of managers; and the business case model, as understood by participants, is analysed for its ontological assumptions that are influencing company practice. I attempt to uncover why it is that managers appear to be unaware of the radical, social equity agenda of sustainable development by examining the 'silences' of the narrative. The conclusion reached is that the narrative of sustainable development in New Zealand is currently dominated by the limited parameters of the business discourse. With no other strong narrative to oppose it, there is a risk that this may be adopted as the authoritative discourse, especially as government departments have formed coalitions with business and still exclude public debate. What is promoted is growth with a social conscience – 'business-as-usual *with a heart*'; but 'at its heart' is the narrative of economic growth.

The lack of discourse about sustainable development was largely confirmed by the business participants. It was members of right-wing organisations, who had made it their 'business' to know about sustainable development;[193] and it was government employees (for example, LGNZ) who produced the most comprehensive definitions. While the *rhetoric* of eco-modernism was rife in the group interviews, corporate

[193] A representative of BusinessNZ had 'made it his business' to examine the different discourses; while the Executive Director of NZBR had a 'shelf-full' of books about the issues.

managers repeatedly said that, substantively, they and their companies '[had] never really given it a lot of thought,' (DSM, Water Utility). It was not central to the debate in organisations: their focus was on liability and compliance under the RMA, risk avoidance and mitigation, safety and health and survival. They had not engaged in discussion about or problematised the construct, even if they had imbibed some of the business rhetoric; and there seemed to be a risk that some, but by no means all, were endorsing something they had not thought through. They had, perhaps, accepted it because it was the 'thing to do' and *appeared* not to clash with dominant business principles; (or, fundamentally, it appealed to something within their own personal values, an aspect I explore in Chapter Nine):

> '... it's nice to have a word that brings all the bits together, and I can't think of a better word than sustainability (*sic*) ... I mean, I haven't sat down and thought about it too hard.' (DSM, Water Utility, member of the NZBCSD).

Others confirmed, at managerial and CEO levels, that, while they nominally subscribed to the principle of sustainable development – paid it lip-service - it was not something that featured significantly in their planning processes or that was regularly on their business agenda; they did not have company meetings about it or discuss it with shareholders: 'so it's not something that ... is the driving force of any organisation, but it's certainly a dimension ... of business,' (GM–A, Electricity Utility). For most of the companies interviewed, sustainable development is not part of what they currently conceive as 'normal' business unless it can be adapted to the business paradigm: 'But that's not done in ... terms of sustainability; that's done in terms of good business practice and sound economics,' (CM, Oil Company). In reality, for many companies, sustainable development represented a void. This supported the emerging view that the concept was being captured and tamed by business: diluted to something managers could absorb rhetorically without interrupting the pragmatic purposes of the business. The Executive Director of a major Industry Council confirmed that sustainable development was recognised chiefly for its profit value: 'most are in fact practising it for financial reasons ... the environmental gains in terms of waste minimization and resource conservation are dictated by the mighty dollar' (PCNZ). Furthermore, the easy rhetoric that has been popularised in New Zealand may have contributed to a somewhat laissez-faire approach to translating 'sustainable development' into operations ('... there's no

such thing as a right or wrong answer'; and, 'there's no right or wrong way of doing it'). Reflexively, when asked to comment on how they believed business in general construed the concept, managers commented that business had no proper grasp of sustainable development - 'I think business reads "sustainable development" for "environment",' (CPM, Telecommunications); or thought about the concept 'as in viability, or survival of their own company,' (EA, Manufacturing). Participants themselves became conscious of the fact that there was 'more to sustainable development' than they had formerly conceived.[194] This emerged especially when asked about why the term had been coined – a question aimed at getting to the radical origins of sustainable development. Managers tended to instance resource depletion, pollution and environmental disasters as the drivers. Occasionally, some prompting helped them to make the link between global issues and business activities:

> 'I think the effects of non-sustainable development started to become evident and tangible. I think things like Chernobyl ... things like the Exxon, things like Union Carbide – there were some events that couldn't be ignored, where evidence of lack of attention to detail, lack of attention to appropriate safety measures, lack of attention to environmental responsibility or social conscience were certainly becoming evident. And I think international communication had improved to the level that you actually heard about these things. We saw animals dying; we saw people dying; saw people getting sick; beaches destroyed; weather patterns changing; children suffering from diseases we hadn't had before. I think people just started taking sustainability more seriously, where they suddenly realised some things were being destroyed forever.' (GM–A, Electricity Utility).

Where issues relating to developing countries were acknowledged, there was a mixed reaction. Some concern was expressed about the environmental consequences of developing countries aspiring to Northern standards of development in terms of increased resource depletion or pollution, of 'Peter robbing Paul', where prompting revealed that 'Peter' represented developing countries who might be subjected to less rigorous legislation under the Kyoto Protocol, 'disadvantaging' the developed world. There was an understanding that people in developing countries had a 'right' to development; but generally a lack of comprehension, or preparedness to accept that this would require greater emancipation, some re-balancing of power and re-

[194] A sub-theme that emerged in the research was the gaps managers began to identify in their own education and training in terms of understanding the issues of sustainable development.

distribution of wealth for developed countries if environmental and social disaster were to be averted. The attraction of third world countries for Northern corporates was recognised as forming part of the environmental problem, although the equity issues tended to be overlooked:

> '... the costs of manufacturing in environment-friendly countries are maybe ten to fifty times more expensive than in the third world ... where they can still let their waste go.' (EC, Energy Services).

However, one senior manager did have a grasp of the asymmetry of Northern/Western power over the developing world:

> '... we've got the Western world doing all the analysis and then phoning up the Indians (*sic*) and telling them, no, you can't do this.' (PCNZ).

Overall, the understanding of the origins of sustainable development was hazy; although it was an area where a degree of reflexivity emerged as people began to note that they would not have considered 'poverty', for instance, as relevant to business until they engaged in the research programme, since business was conceived of as relieving poverty. The structural relationship between the administrative state, business and people and the distribution of power was generally one of the silences of the discussions and not easy to open up. Sometimes, it was possible to witness the struggle people made to come to terms with why the concept was coined in the first place. For example, the following illustrates how a participant was beginning to recognise intra-generational eco-injustice at home as well as in the third world (such as disfiguring roads routed through poorer neighbourhoods):

> '... the price paid by underdeveloped communities, whether it's in New Zealand or overseas. People of lower socio-economic communities are targeted ... because industries do know that they won't get away with it in another area.' (GEM, Construction).

At the same time, the scepticism voiced by one person about the 'real' origins of sustainable development was not very far removed from a Marxian analysis. This focused on the perceived hegemony of the affluent Northern middle class for whom it was a selfish 'fad', a 'gerrymander' and a way of controlling others:

> 'The very wealthy first world ... who were profiting on the back of third world exploitation over the previous three or four hundred years of colonisation ... had the luxury to sit back and reflect on other things in life than just making a crust ... the arrogance inherent in the whole concept of

> "I'm going to tell somebody else how to live their life". Sustainability as it's currently portrayed is fascist and leads to dictatorship ... the people peddling it are all well-heeled.' (EM, Primary Production).

However, for the most part, the conceptions offered were uncritical and 'weak', and in some ways reflected the counter-discourse of the right-wing lobby, which clearly must speak for more than itself. In fact, quite a strong anti-Labour government current amongst the managers echoed that right-wing discourse, particularly antagonism to the government's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and its social agenda:

> ' ... maybe if the government didn't have such a welfare state sort of mentality in New Zealand they could afford to reduce the corporate tax rate.' (EA, Manufacturing).

It was interesting in these cases to observe that understandings of sustainable development were superficial, and did not include possibilities of 'business pain' being part of the equation. As the critical commentator quoted earlier also remarked, it is notable that some companies talk 'sustainable development' while lobbying against international legislation such as the Kyoto Protocol.

The conceptions that both managers and people from the broader context discussed were of limited heterogeneity and chiefly conflated with concepts of environmental management. The focus was largely on issues of compliance, risk and eco-efficient use of resources. In some cases, this was still understood and practised at the level of quite modest 'green housekeeping' programmes of 'incentivising staff to do small things': switch off lights, recycle paper and generally be more economical with the company's resources. As one participant remarked, it was natural that companies would begin with modest investments of time and money, especially where no broader vision exists:

> '... I've got no doubt that in amongst the range of interpretations of sustainable development corporates will start at the easy end versions: they won't, as I call it, go *vegan.*' (DCS, Gas Utility).

For most of the managers interviewed, their work revolved around responsibility for company compliance. It was the area where they could expect the most support from

the company ('having negative prosecutions'), and was also the 'environmental' area most likely to be linked to investment activities:

> '... environmental compliance ... would be the other big driver; and then, as you invest, trying to get a little bit ahead of compliance, and a bit smarter at what you're doing.' (SP, Manufacturing).

Where a company was spending new capital, it had to anticipate what environmental standards would be required for consent purposes in the future. It was emphasized a number of times that, even though such compliance still signified 'weak' sustainability, it was no simple thing to achieve within the corporate setting ('There are companies which struggle even to comply', GEM, Construction): corporate managers know better than most that business has generally not moved very far in terms of dealing with environmental issues, much less social ones:

> 'The rocks that I see on the way [are] just the simple environmental issues. I say 'simple': we haven't solved them yet – things like emissions and pollution aspects ... [as for] closed loop and recycling, that's a much bigger step.' (SP, Manufacturing).

These managers work at the 'chalk face' of environmental compliance – some are noted as exceptional environmental, SHE or asset managers – yet they made clear the difficulty they had even in implementing environmental management strategies, sometimes receiving little support for their role. In two cases during the course of the research, I witnessed outcomes of the ideological and institutional impediments to sustainable development that operate in organisations when environmental managers from the core group quickly became expendable as company profits slumped or the company was merged or taken over. The daily focus of managers, therefore, was not upon sustainable development, but the more tangible and demonstrable goals of 'resource and asset conservation and utilisation'; 'emissions'; 'pollution'; 'anything that uses resources and spits out waste'; 'closing the loop and recycling', always with an eye on 'compliance' and avoiding risks and fines:

> '... we call it product stewardship [which] is all around managing products from the cradle to grave. I have to say there's some self-serving reasons for that; *not the least is liability.*' (SHEA, Chemicals, emphasis added).

By and large, managers saw compliance as the way they could best help to drive a company shift towards sustainable development; but the result was sometimes the increased confusion of corporate environmental compliance with sustainable

development: ('... we'll do this [compliance] and we'll [believe we are] meeting our sustainable development requirement,' NEM, Beverages). Consequently, at company level and in the broader context, there tended to be some considerable faith in 'solutions' being provided by science and technology, although without acknowledgement of the problems 'techno-fixes' have also caused :

> 'I think there are grounds for being optimistic about technology ... over that sort of [thirty year] time horizon you're getting a very rapid evolution of technology.' (CEO, Mining Company).

In general, this optimism about technological solutions did not address the question of the *scale* of environmental problems, and the insufficiency of technology to solve these.[195] Technology was clung to as a way of reconciling economic growth with the resolution of ecological problems. From the perspective of the conservative groups, it was also important that companies were not pressed to go *too far* even in terms of environmental responsibility. This reflects their stated scepticism about the scale of the problems; but also, perhaps, their consciousness of the likely impact on companies of more severe legislation when issues of scale finally become acknowledged. Corporate environmentalism had become more acceptable as an antidote to sustainable development, as long as its parameters were kept under control:

> '... businesses have been increasingly conscious of environmental issues ... and I totally endorse that. But I think it's equally important to be rigorous about these kinds of issues because, far too often, scares, exaggerations and so forth take over.'(NZBR).

When issues of intergenerational justice, time-frames for moving towards sustainable development and the overall area of 'futurity' were raised, it was generally a focus on industry viability that surfaced:

> 'As far as industry is concerned [it's] best expressed by doing what we do best without degrading the environment or resources that *we are going to need* in the future.' (NZCIC, emphasis added).

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[195] However, a member of MFAT commented: '[People say] ... we have technology up our sleeves ... But when you apply that argument to some of the ecologically disastrous trends ... I still do not see how technology is going to turn it around'; and a corporate manager commented retrospectively: 'I've started to realise the huge scale of some of these unsustainable actions ...' (CEM, Construction).

Some participants had a broader understanding of 'futurity' and the implications of intergenerational equity. This was sometimes related to their concern about the future of their children; for example, in the following (still utilitarian) comment by one of the few women in the group:

> 'I always refer back to the future when I think about sustainable development ... whatever we're doing in business, personal life, government policy ... we must do in a way, or at a rate, that doesn't actually undermine my children's or my grandchildren's needs to meet their social and economic needs.' (CPM, Telecommunications).

There tended to be an assumption that relatively short time-frames would be sufficient to fix problems, especially amongst those who were more technologically optimistic. For example, there were suggestions of substantial improvements within one or two generations, although some people could not foresee significant change within a hundred years or more. These optimistic time-frames and the general inability to grasp the scale of problems no doubt reflected the lack of involvement in discourse about sustainable development.

The interpretation of futurity as 'business viability', and the ideological conviction that economic growth is the necessary basis of environmental and social improvement, meant that the discourse was positioned for appropriation to the principles of 'eco-efficiency' promulgated by the WBCSD, and now by the NZBCSD. For example, the focus on business risk and 'eco-efficient' use of resources ('cost-cutting, making more with less ... doing more output with less product,' EA, Manufacturing) is central to that model, representing accommodation to 'political sustainability' and 'keeping the capitalist engine in motion' (Schumpeter, 1961). Eco-efficiency addresses genuinely important issues but may deflect demands for more radical change. Within a broader debate about economic goals and organisational governance it would clearly play a key role; but it is being promulgated in such a way as to replace that debate. While it calls for a level of dematerialisation of production, greater levels of growth are also factored in – it becomes a way of stretching production further, not of re-orienting business to meeting 'real' needs while reducing levels of production and consumption. In New Zealand, as elsewhere, the eco-modernist model of eco-efficiency or the 'business case' is currently being openly promoted for profit, competitive advantage and other

self-serving drivers such as positive PR. These were the drivers and goals central to managers' 'visions' of sustainable business:

> ' ... there's more *efficient* ways of doing things ... and often they are *more economic* in the longer term ... we'd *feel better* by using them ... *we'd get better press if we did.*' (GM-A, Electricity Utility, emphasis added).

However, one manager who worked for a company that had, indeed, made very large savings (and gained much positive PR spin) from energy efficiency and zero waste programmes, recognised this as still conducting business-as-usual: ' ... we're actually still working *within that ... same model,* ' (EC, Retailing).

In the broader context, too, understanding of sustainable development was framed in terms of eco-efficient practices, employing the now common mantra of 'economic growth, social growth and environmental protection', and producing business' dream of futurity:

> ' ... using resources effectively and efficiently and achieving sustainable economic growth at the same time as you're using those resources.' (BusinessNZ).

The language of eco-efficiency was again employed to tell a story of caution, of keeping environmental and compliance issues to the fore, but, above all, preserving growth. The concern about the changing *cost* and *value* of resources in the future[196] was real and surfaced a number of times. Scientific and technological progress is key to this model, and it was in terms of technological solutions that people became most positive, talking of 'optimism' and 'hope', and 'our future'. This was also notable because of the parallel theme of 'fear' that arose in several of the interviews when people talked about the environmental problematic. It was 'fear' that was proposed as the keenest driver of environmental management: fear of business failure, generally; but also fear of irrevocable environmental damage, and, in clean, green New Zealand, largely dependent on primary production, of bio-security risks.[197]

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[196] What Escobar (1996:47) has termed 'capitalised nature' and the reinvention of *nature*, rather than of capitalism (Chapter Five).

[197] LGNZ; and the Safety, Health and Environment Advisor with a chemicals company.

The adoption of eco-modernism's chief tool of eco-efficiency marked the goal most managers in the sample aspired to, and certainly signified the absolute parameters for the conservative business lobby. It is the underpinning of the 'business case' that is promoted by the WBCSD and the NZBCSD. Only three of the companies in the sample belonged to the NZBCSD when the research commenced, yet the language, opinions and attitudes promoted by these organisations were rife. The general lack of contestation of sustainable development in New Zealand may have been one reason for this easy appropriation of the business case discourse, linked with the fact that government agencies have promoted the same language and concepts through their coalition with the NZBCSD, giving the discourse 'authority' or 'reifying' it. The 'business case' is now used as synonymous with sustainable development which has become reconstructed as though its raison d'être were to serve the purposes of business.[198] The fact that the chief opposition has arisen from the right-wing lobby, with some emotive and conservative discourse, has possibly even strengthened the case of the 'green knights' of eco-modernism: it has certainly raised their profile. However, there is an alternative, more counter-hegemonic discourse that is now developing, as well as some critique from within companies, which I examine in Chapter Nine. Otherwise, without a great deal of democratic participation in the dialogue – and based on some exclusion of non-members or of counter-hegemonic views from their own discourse – the chief proponents of the business case have effectively silenced radical discourse, at least for now. The business case that is promoted also 'makes sense' to most business managers within the ideological constraints that characterise their work environments and construct their own understanding of sustainable development. The research process unearthed some critique of the limitations that eco-modernism implies, but the model still represented the best that managers could hope to aspire to. Individual and core group interviews indicated that the radical agenda of sustainable development formed part of a hidden curriculum of silences or nondecision-making: managers had not imagined that some of the issues were part of the business agenda.

Closer examination of the interview data did reveal that the participants whose company belonged (or had belonged) to the NZBCSD tended to be most vocal about

[198] Sunderlin, 1995, and Escobar, 1996, argue that this is its purpose. (Chapters Three and Five).

the benefits of the business case and were most likely to promulgate its language, metaphors and ideas. Other participants were somewhat less likely to do this, relying more closely on the language and concepts of environmental compliance, although they were mostly familiar with the business language. The business case was recognisable for its (attractive) focus on sustainable development as 'viability': ('[being] able to continue doing business in the way I am doing it for ever and ever'; 'sustainable development is probably the other dimension of the business case,' GM-A, Electricity Utility); and sometimes by an 'evangelistic' tone, although it was the evangelism of profit that was promoted. One member of the Council commented that 'making money into the future means getting value from marketing opportunities that are part of sustainability,' (EM, Primary Production); while another emphasized the international data indicating gains in share performance where companies had followed the 'business case':

> 'I think when you analyse their share performance over the last four years those companies have actually done better as a group than other companies.' (DSM, Water Utility).[199]

This claim did not take into account the fact that financially successful companies had been targeted by the WBCSD and the NZBCSD in the first place. The first speaker also explained that the Council regarded the 'business case' as basically no more than a 'business strategy' to increase profit; adding, sceptically, that the more 'evangelical' proponents of the case 'communicate that they do it purely for ethical reasons,' (EM, Primary Production), which was also one of the issues that drew the fire of the conservative lobby. One corporate member of the Council commented with enthusiasm on what it was like to belong:

> '... it's a bit like a secret society, isn't it? There's only a handful of us ... singing off the same song-sheet – that actually know this [sustainable development/the business case] has got some merit.' (EA, Manufacturing).

Participants from companies that had declined to join the Council suggested that its influence on companies outside its membership had actually been limited, although the coalition with government departments had been noted by business:

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[199] A representative of the NZCTU critiqued this focus on shareholder return: '... it's actually advocated as a more profitable sort of thing – that you actually get better shareholder returns ... [but] ... it's not a matter of getting highest shareholder returns; it's actually ... got to be good in itself for the environmental reasons, for the social reasons.' (CTU).

> 'They've probably shaped some of the wider debate which then is picked up by government, and vice versa. They may have got some of the ideas from government as well ... We observe them ... but we won't automatically assume they're the model to follow.' (SP, Manufacturing).

The conservative lobby was more critical of the Council, its leaders and the business case. For example, the Council had refused to engage with the NZBR in debate about climate change and the Business Roundtable's publication on corporate social responsibility (Henderson, 2001); and they were dismissed as operating on a 'feel good' basis. One of the severest critics saw the WBCSD/NZBCSD as being 'all about stopping governments legislating: that's their key role,' (CDL). They were seen as promoting hyper-production and consumption while government, through this coalition, was being 'sucked in' to 'believing their rhetoric'. It appears that a more critical perception of the Council and its role is beginning to emerge in New Zealand, along with a consciousness that the hegemonic coalition between the Council and government excludes some sections of industry.[200]

The basic contradiction that is at the heart of sustainable development, between ecological and social sustainability and economic growth, is what the 'business case' is built upon, and some participants commented on the discomfort this caused them: they had problems with the term: for example, 'the word *development* ... with *sustainability,'* (CDL, emphasis added); or felt there was 'almost a *conflict* between "development" and "sustainability",' (PCNZ, emphasis added). The fact that the business case emerges specifically from that contradiction was best summed up by a representative of trade unions:

> '... there tends to be two sets of advocates ... One is a set ... who advocate it [sustainable development] because it's "a good thing"; and others who advocate it because it's actually "a good thing for business".' (Economist, CTU).

The most notable thing about the research process was the difficulty of getting the radical social aspects of sustainable development onto the agenda, even though a number of the research questions were designed to open up such issues, and they

[200] NZCIC and BusinessNZ representatives spoke of such exclusion.

were probed in a number of ways. Similarly, the socially constructed nature of the 'givens' of the business case was not recognised by participants and was difficult to explore in the interviews. Social issues were acknowledged by people from the government context, by community development and unions representatives; but the managers chiefly seemed to make the connection through a reflexive process encouraged by the research itself - for example, after recognising that the social issues they were aware of on a *personal* basis were also relevant to business. In a sense, the research process gave them 'permission' to make those connections, opening up the conceptual space within which they performed their business operations; otherwise, the role of business in 'constructing' social problems was not readily recognised. One negative way in which 'social' issues in New Zealand entered the discourse was through the criticism that people from companies and other organisations levelled at government for its social policies, particularly in relation to Maori. The policy of 'closing the gaps', and the addition of a 'cultural' bottom line to the TBL in order to take into account the Treaty of Waitangi and the cultural beliefs of the indigenous population caused some critical reaction:

> ' ... this cultural thing which takes us under an even vaguer area; and nobody's explained to me yet exactly what that means in terms of sustainable growth (*sic*).' (BusinessNZ).

Overall, 'social' was constructed to mean looking after employees and having good relations with the community in which the business was located (community consultation being a fundamental requirement of the RMA). This focus was, to some extent, led by the definition of 'social' issues and 'needs' emanating from the NZBCSD and similar organisations: 'business case' projects, for example, included involvement of managers with local schools[201] and youth employment projects. In the goals of the Council, attending to the 'needs' of people tends to emerge as further potential for business advantage as opposed to an ethical norm. Added to this was the emphasis on improved stakeholder engagement/management. None of the participants took into account the constructed nature of social 'needs' or the role of business in creating these. The approach was 'managerial' – another 'problem' to be managed by experts; and this aspect of the research will be examined in Chapter

[201] The 'construction' of future consumers as a result of such 'projects' is a topic for further research.

Eight. The original focus of 'development' in the Brundtland Report was generally missed or ignored. Others made passing reference to social and cultural issues and 'needs', but generally could not be drawn out to develop the themes. Managers felt most comfortable talking about meeting the 'needs' of employees – something they are obliged to do through legislation such as the Health and Safety in Employment Amendment Act (HSEA, 2002) and the new Employment Relations Act (ERA, 2000), which might explain why this 'social' aspect was uppermost in their thoughts.[202] However, as Chapter Nine also shows, their concern for meeting 'needs' tended to emerge as 'getting good value' out of employees by selecting the best and 'using them as the catalyst to deliver value', chiefly through the panopticisms of management: 'performance evaluation', 'performance review', 'paying for top performance' and 'developing people'. It came close to treating people as a resource, and, as with other resources, getting the best efficiency out of them.

7.4 Concluding Comments

Although there appear to be two dominant narratives of sustainable development in New Zealand, competing for power to act as the disciplinary force that shapes that concept, at least for business, they share the same ontological basis of business-as-usual. One represents the traditional capitalist paradigm; the other its image clothed in the guise of eco-modernism. Neither views sustainable development as the means to structural or institutional change that would encourage greater environmental and social justice. They are different means of repressing any strong narrative of sustainable development - although the research revealed that at least one of the 'icons' of the 'business case' is feeling some severe discomfort at the recognition of the gap between what the Business Council promulgates and the reality of unsustainability.[203] The fact that discursive formations coalesce around each of these positions gives the impression of contestation where, essentially, little exists. One set

[202] The Employment Relations Act (ERA, 2000) requires that employee 'stress' be taken into account in the workplace, with provision to assist employees with difficulties. The HSEA, 2002, calls for worker participation in health, safety and environment issues decision-making in the workplace.

[203] This business leader was reported as having stated: '... I can't make my company sustainable. I have to get my money out and do something else that is sustainable. I can't do it in the business'; while two other members of the NZBCSD were paraphrased as saying: 'Forget it. We can't be responsible. The quarterly return regime means we can't.'

of business icons – neo-liberal, conservative and 'dry' – has found another set jockeying for the leadership position, and gathering companies and individuals to their cause who understand the need to do business 'differently', even if they do not subscribe to a radical formation around sustainable development. These are the promoters of the WBCSD's coinage of eco-efficiency, who tend to present their paradigm in 'social' terms of caring, of business 'with a heart'; although what they actually promote is continued growth through resource (including human resource) efficiency. It is as though a 'contestation' of paradigms has been constructed as a 'displacement' for the radical agenda of sustainable development. Both groups fail to acknowledge the scale and severity of the social and environmental problematic and both perpetuate a version of the modernist discourse of progress. They abide by the same 'givens' or sacred tenets: increased economic growth as a natural phenomenon, not a social construct, providing the 'true' basis of sustainability; and the right and ability of business to manage the debate. Agency is ascribed to 'growth' and an essentialised notion of the market, not to empowerment and the re-balancing of asymmetric power relations which might shift the discourse to sustainable development.

Any discursive struggle that is in progress in New Zealand is not between these two major groups striving to legitimate the story of 'economic development and environmentalism'. The emerging discourse of ecological and humanitarian concern is examined in Chapter Nine. The 'business case' takes us a step forward in terms of eco-efficiency and practical benchmarks, which is clearly to the good; but no serious attention is paid to the social/equality discourse at the heart of the capitalist/labour relations upon which 'progress' and economic growth are based. The exclusionary tactics employed by its champions in New Zealand are drawing comment and criticism about the gap between the values of sustainable development and their own less than democratic modus operandi, which, in two instances, precluded my extending my research inquiry to include organisations. The narrative of management that supports the position of the two main protagonist groups, and government's role in constructing that narrative, are examined next. In spite of its own social and equity goals and a desire to promote a 'gentler' form of growth, the Labour-coalition government has not encouraged the multiplicity of perspectives that more horizontal conjunctions might foster. This is despite its commitments to the

indigenous people of New Zealand, and the potential driver, currently lost, of preparing a New Zealand Sustainable Development Strategy informed by public participation. Government has become seen as part of the discursive pyramid of power.

Chapter Eight

'Managing' Sustainable Development

> After they've been told for a while, stories can turn into politics, into our institutions, and it is important that they seem just the way things are, and the way they have to go on being.
>
> Hanif Kureishi, *Loose Tongues and Liberty*, Guardian Review, 7 June, 2003, pp. 4-6.

8.1 Introduction

Important goals of the research were to discover whether sustainable development was being appropriated in New Zealand; what the means of appropriation comprised; and whether the hegemonic capture was complete or contested. This chapter builds upon the argument developed thus far that semantic capture - 'management' of the rhetoric of the discourse - is a major strategy of appropriation. It focuses on the control of the 'agenda' of sustainable development - the way the discourse is framed; what is considered legitimate to the narrative; and what is silenced or repressed. It reveals that a sub-set of management issues makes up the appropriated agenda of sustainable development, encompassed in the project of eco-efficiency that eviscerates the radical potential of the concept. This project powerfully and persuasively determines what is 'managed into' and what is 'managed out' of the agenda, with social equity and institutional issues taking a low priority. The result is that the role of institutional and structural issues in creating unsustainable development is repressed, representing a 'silence' in the 'business case' rhetoric that further legitimates dominant structures.

New corporate structures that have emerged specifically to 'control' and 'manage' the discourse legitimate corporate power over sustainable development,[204] including business front groups, business-government coalitions, and coalitions formed with international institutions.[205] These have given rise to a thriving 'industry of

[204] Chapter Five,

[205] At the international level we have witnessed the powerful operations of business groups at such fora as UNCED and the WSSD, where the level of appropriation was observed, but was difficult to oppose because of the business coalitions formed with governments (Chapter Five).

sustainable development', which, like the 'environmental industry' before it, sells 'solutions' to 'problems' that business identifies for attention, rather than challenging the fundamental causes of unsustainable development and their resolution. The contention that sustainable development is in the process of being captured in New Zealand is based on the deconstruction of the 'management' framework and its appropriation of the language, content and agenda of sustainable development. This chapter focuses on the actors that exercise hegemonic control over the agenda, the institutional structures they represent, and the ways in which they manage and tame a concept as complex as sustainable development. In managerial mode, it is scaled down and simplified, with its 'messy' and 'inefficient' radical component eliminated. The result is a pragmatic narrative, laced with a certain amount of evangelical hype, but hard-focused on maintaining economic development in the interests of capitalist business. It is not contended that the emasculation of the concept is necessarily planned or consciously undertaken - although it is difficult to believe that business front groups do not understand their own agendas. In the end, however, they may not be able to control its constitutive elements, or the contestation that is beginning to emerge.

Both written and spoken accounts are drawn upon to piece together the narrative. Section 8.2 sets the management discourse of sustainable development in the context of crucial political and social changes that have marked the past fifteen years in New Zealand, and that shape conceptions today. Sections 8.3 and 8.4 examine the institutional control exercised by two major agents: the content and 'silences' of the 'government case' and the 'business case' for sustainable development are opened up in the light of the research matrix (Appendix 2) and the 'weak-strong' heuristic, and their similarities and differences noted. Section 8.5 explores the 'narrative of management' that emerged from the corporate interviews, where the fundamental goal to emerge was the perpetuation of the model of production and consumption and 'sustaining' its practices. Section 8.6 provides some concluding comments and posits that the considerable hegemony unearthed is not complete: a level of counter-hegemonic discourse that emerged during the research may signal its contestation.

8.2 Contextualising Sustainable Development in New Zealand

A brief contextual overview of some features of New Zealand's recent history sets the scene for the ensuing discussion of the challenge sustainable development presents for government and business. This frames the narrative of the 'business case' that has quickly appropriated areas of the discourse in New Zealand by focusing on the accustomed maneggiare paradigm; and suggests that an important opportunity to develop a different kind of narrative for New Zealand has been lost – although not necessarily irrecoverably. As Chapter One noted, my work began at an interesting juxtaposition of events in New Zealand that have institutional relevance for this inquiry. Public reaction at the end of the 1990s against neo-liberal policies might have indicated an ideal moment to open up a discourse on the country's values and the future of the economy based on the principles of sustainable development.[206] The reaction against extremes of wealth and poverty previously uncommon in New Zealand, the privatisation of state-owned property, and overseas ownership of a fair proportion of business indicated the opportunity for 'reclaiming the future' (Kelsey, 1999). The election of Labour-led coalition governments in 1999 and 2002 signalled the country's revolt against extreme free-market practices that had changed the nature of New Zealand. The government took power on a platform of greater social equity and justice, while promising to grow New Zealand's economy back to something like its former OECD and World Bank ratings, albeit it through 'gentler' growth. At neither of the elections was the government platform remarkable for its stance on environment or sustainable development: it focused on decent and equitable employment; better social services; and improved integration of the indigenous population ('closing the gaps'). For more than a decade, New Zealand had witnessed the economic benefits of much of its business 'trickle up' and 'flood out' of the country (Conway, 2001). Government's desire to halt this process and its platform of improved social equity exacerbated the traditionally uncomfortable

[206] The neo-liberalist experiment had been introduced during the previous Labour administrations of 1984-1990, costing Labour the government, and was continued by the National-coalition governments that succeeded Labour. Kelsey (1999) points out that, by 1999, there was a growing demand for an alternative to the free market agenda, opening up the opportunity for a wider debate on the future directions of the country.

relationship between business and Labour, possibly signalling that a 'hand of friendship' would have to be extended by government.[207]

There is a potential anomaly between goals of social equity and justice and an economy focused on attaining higher levels of GDP and GNP that pivots, to some extent, on government's need to avoid further alienating business. This conundrum, the imminence of the WSSD in 2002 and the OECD requirement that member countries prepare Sustainable Development Strategies, may have indicated the expediency of a government-business coalition with the *'sustainable development industry'*[208] - chiefly with the representatives of the NZBCSD, but also with 'experts' from mainstream business. It possibly suggested a means of framing a Sustainable Development Strategy without the 'interruption' of democratic process, even though the promise of public dialogue had featured in government papers on sustainable development. It at least promised a different relationship with a group of businesses that were not – ostensibly – focused on growth to the exclusion of social goals, and that were 'committed' to New Zealand. If a coalition has been formed between government and this group – and the evidence appears to be strong – then this can be seen as a reciprocal relationship that suits both parties. The NZBCSD gained privileged access to the ear of government in order to advocate for voluntary, industry-led approaches and to influence policy; while government could more easily demonstrate a *business and sustainable development* 'stance'. It is argued here, however, that the overall outcome of this coalition has been to constrain – or fail to democratise – the discourse on sustainable development; and that such a narrow, pyramidical coalition, employing the juridical power represented in government to legitimise the 'infra-law' or 'counter power' of business, is not in New Zealand's broader interests.

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[207] The Labour government's wish to ease its potentially uncomfortable relationship with business was marked by its establishment of 'Business Forums' whereby business people and politicians could attempt to establish common goals for business in New Zealand. However, at the New Zealand Innovation Conference 2003, the Prime Minister questioned the business agenda of 'growth' and expressed her fear that this signalled a desired return to the neo-liberalism of the 1980s. (Sunday Star Times, 9 March, 2003).

[208] This expressive phrase was used in the interview with representatives of Business New Zealand, but was also used by some of the corporate managers to describe 'sustainable development consultants' who sought contracts with their companies (GM-A, Electricity Utility, 2002).

The origins of the government-business coalition are of interest in light of my theme here. The chief driver of the establishment of the NZBCSD – (although, on the surface, and by tradition of the original BCSD/WICE/WBCSD formations, a coalition of 'business' leaders) – appears, in fact, to have been the Ministry for the Environment (MfE), under the previous National coalition government, in partnership with a Crown Research Institute (former MfE Deputy Secretary and founding NZBCSD Executive Officer, personal communication, 1999). The move was publicly aligned to the election of two New Zealand companies to the WBCSD. The coalition is, then, driven partly by government agency (although not necessarily representing current core government policy or design), but represents an extension of the hegemony of a corporate élite that controls some of the international debate. It has created a funnel for business to influence government policy.[209] The democratic public process promised as part of the development of the Strategy might have challenged the business coalition's influence over government thinking and possibly the eco-modernist discourse of sustainable development that appoints business as the arbiter. The very act of democratic debate might have exposed to actors who contest the eco-modernist paradigm the level and condition of the government discourse and any central hegemony.[210] As it is, the major public contestation to emerge has been the Report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE, 2002b)[211] which defines the NZBCSD's case as supporting 'weak' sustainable development (p.34), and promulgates the need for conceptual and institutional change.

The discourse formation between government and the NZBCSD, 'managerial' in its stance, is already opposed by the conservative, mainstream business lobby (Chapter Seven); and, increasingly, by academic and other professional groups, although for different reasons. Otherwise, any coalition forged between them, as is the way with such structures, tends to go unrecognised, even by business managers. Nevertheless,

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[209] The Prime Minister's Office confirmed that NZBCSD members had been key to the discussion of the Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) prior to the WSSD. What role the coalition – or its most powerful members – may have played in New Zealand's decision *not* to produce the SDS before or after the WSSD is not yet clear.

[210] The formation of the Royal Society's 'Sustainable Development Forum' in 2002 might represent the potential for some opposition to the current hegemony.

[211] The PCE's Report is critiqued in Chapter Nine.

there are many ways of entering the life-world of people, and some of the 'icons' of the 'business case' are passing into New Zealand mythology as 'green knights', particularly through their own branding strategies and ability to command media attention. There is a possibility that theirs will come to represent the 'official' discourse of sustainable development in New Zealand: it is an appealing discourse that focuses on 'problems' that business can 'define' and then solve, such as waste management and energy efficiency, with elements of philanthropy. This would be an unfortunate prognosis, since their approach – for all its 'social' concern – represses democratic, participatory principles and smacks of 'gate-keeping' and exclusion. Tight control is exercised over what is up for debate, who contributes what ideas, and who is excluded from contribution of any kind.[212]

8.3 The 'Government Case' for Sustainable Development

Although New Zealand became a signatory to Agenda 21 post-UNCED (1992), successive governments (National- and Labour-led coalitions) have been accused of largely ignoring the Agenda (PCE, 2002b): for nearly a decade, sustainable development was notable in government discourse chiefly for its absence. This 'silence' is particularly resonant when Environmental, Social and Economic Strategies drafted during the period 1992-2002 are examined for statements on sustainable development. A Review of these (PCE, 2002a) conducted prior to the WSSD identified key central government strategies that were relevant to the principles of Agenda 21, and examined them for references to sustainable development as a guiding principle.[213] The Review itself does not explore conceptions or constructions of sustainable development, but focuses upon 'mentions' of the concept and the proposed means of 'management'. It does, however, expose the total absence of specific reference to sustainable development in strategies where the concept might have been considered to be a key principle, raising some questions about understanding of and commitment to sustainable

[212] The establishment of the Royal Society's 'Sustainable Development Forum' brought the initial reaction from the NZBCSD that its members would not like to see this new formation in any way 'conflict' with their own role.

[213] Appendix 8 provides an overview of the relevant Strategies and a summary of comments from the Review.

development at Ministry level.[214] Also notable is the language employed in the Strategies, 'sustainable management' and 'sustained economic growth' and some of the rhetoric of the business lobby being favoured, suggesting government agency 'buy-in' to the business case, possibly in default of having a 'case' of their own. It is quite difficult to find any government or Ministry 'position' stated until preparations began for the WSSD, when the PM's Office and Cabinet papers provided a clearer insight into the government stance on sustainable development. The PCE's Review itself is framed in a managerialist approach, seeking 'indicators', 'assessment' and 'classification' - ways of objectifying sustainable development; but the gap it reveals nonetheless reflects the status that sustainable development occupied in the decade after UNCED. The 'silence' unearthed may partly explain the current reaction of conservative business groups to the relatively mild steps towards sustainable development now taken by the Labour government: even this circumspect approach changes the discourse and the balance of power and threatens to be constitutive of outcomes that mainstream business opposes.

The substance of the Labour government's platform and the 'fit' between its goals and those of sustainable development have been discussed (Chapter Seven). The tension between the need to grow the economy and to attend to urgent social issues resulted in the embedding of socialist approaches in a 'growth' framework. While this is perhaps not intended to limit the debate, it necessarily places certain constraints upon it. The PM's address to the WSSD highlighted the need for a 'different kind' of growth, not only in New Zealand:

> 'there can be no long-term benefit from growth based on low environmental standards ... or which fails to lift the quality of life of our people.' (PM's Address to WSSD, 2002).

This and other statements signal that, while the government's major commitment is to grow the New Zealand economy - seen as essential to delivering its promise of opportunities and improved equity - it is envisioned as growth of a new kind, creating 'an inclusive economy for all';[215] a more sensitive kind of growth, beneficial to a wider section of the people and kinder to the environment (MED, personal

[214] For example, the Bio-Security Strategy, still in development at the time of the PCE Report (2002).

[215] [CAB (00) M 12/13, section 14].

communication, 2003). It does not embrace the radical alternative strategies for the economy favoured by government's coalition partner, the Green Party: it is essentially a pragmatic stance. The economic and political reality for government is that it needs to return New Zealand to the top half of the OECD rankings for GDP if it is to achieve its social goals *and* return to office in 2005. The dilemma is essentially the one at the heart of sustainable development: balancing economic growth with social justice – finding the fit between the two. This is signalled in government accounts:

> '- just as an economy ... in long-term recession is not sustainable, neither is a situation where many people are denied opportunity and face poverty and social exclusion. Equally, development that ignores the essential needs of the poorest people or erodes the quality of our environment is not sustainable development.' ([CAB (00) M 12/3]).

Government (not without scoring political points) sees its first commitment as rectifying the consequences of years of unsustainable economic growth followed by economic decline, signified in 'rising inflation, growing unemployment, emerging balance of payments [problems] – increases in inequality and distribution of income or wealth' (MED, 2000). These issues target some of the social/equity principles of sustainable development, and signify the area where government and business relationships have become most strained, since this focus goes to the heart of the capital/labour relationship. It is, nevertheless, a conception of 'the good life' based on current institutional arrangements, not on radical change, new structures or a different conceptual view of the world (PRISM/Knight, 2000). The history of Labour in New Zealand is one of fairly short terms of office interspersed with long periods in opposition. The 'balanced' approach is therefore politically astute, but still too radical for groups who detect in the government's policies an emerging state-led accumulation strategy, under the guise of eco-modernisation, that might lead to more regulation and taxes and policies of redistribution. At the same time it is, as yet, too weak to make sustainable development a guiding principle for governing New Zealand.

The WSSD further concentrated the political mind, as is reflected in government accounts produced since 2000.[216] These accounts help to construct a 'weak' conception of sustainable development, with the danger of silencing its complex and radical agenda.[217] The starting point in government accounts, as noted in Chapter Seven, is the Brundtland definition (and the UK government paraphrase of that), with a number of the core themes of the Brundtland Report imbuing social policy goals. What emerges is a careful crafting of a 'balance' between the principles of sustainable development and the 'softer' model of economic growth. Widespread business suspicion of this government no doubt fosters a degree of caution in government statements and practices; and, as indicated, the government is careful not to be goaded into 'extremism' by the Green Party, which has difficulty in explaining how its own more 'radical' goals would be enacted. The Prime Minister's comments on the government's stance (9 June, 2001) underline the sensitive and political nature of sustainable development:

> 'Sustainable development can have *negative connotations* or seem *irrelevant* to some sectors,' (p. 5, emphasis added).[218]

Particular concerns[219] that are then highlighted indicate a broad awareness of the political power of the concept, an understanding of the challenge it presents to government and the opposition it may incur:

- It is often solely equated with environmental protection;
- Those who see sustainable development as a threat to their own interests, *or solely as a way of promoting those interests* (emphasis added);
- There are high expectations as well as some scepticism outside government;
- Concern that government will attempt to control the process and result;

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[216] Appendix 6.

[217] Some bold measures have been enacted during the government's period in office such as the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, which was particularly unpopular with business.

[218] Proposal – *New Zealand Sustainable Development Strategy*, Section 26: *Risks*.

[219] Notably, these 'concerns' chiefly reflect business challenges to sustainable development.

- Concern that various interests will capture the work on sustainable development;
- Scepticism about the effectiveness of creating 'strategies';
- Widespread ignorance about what sustainable development is; and,
- Concern that a sustainable development approach will not have longevity.

There is a clear recognition here that an ideological construct such as sustainable development means that whatever government does will be contested by business *and* radical groups. Currently, the business sector appears to be the more influential. Government might, in fact, have garnered more public support and fostered a less constrained conception of sustainable development through the participatory approach which the development of the SDS offered. Some of the accounts provided in government documents tend to have a 'simplistic' ring, reminiscent (or replicative) of the rhetoric of the NZBCSD. This is possibly a result of the attempt to 'simplify' a complex construct for general comprehension; but it might also be to keep conservative business criticism at bay. The language employed, and that ignored, shapes the content of the debate and determines the silences. It results in some rhetoric that could mean almost anything: 'everything is connected' (MfE, 2000); 'meeting social and environmental goals – at the same time' (MfE, op. cit.); 'ensuring a better life for everyone – now and in generations to come' (PM's speech on Sustainable Development, 2001). Such attempts to use 'the language of the street' are too vague to encapsulate the principles of sustainable development or the radical change these call for - but they are semiotic ways of constraining the agenda. It is not a case for 'strong' sustainable development that is presented: to some extent the concept is being 'produced' to fit the government's agenda rather than driving that agenda as a normative principle. Sustainable development is being constructed in these accounts to support the representative short-term power invested in government that is out of kilter with the intergenerational goals integral to the concept. The short-termism of the political process is itself an institutional barrier to sustainable development, and makes shorter-term, concrete plans of 'action' more attractive and feasible for government than a values-shift for New Zealand society.

The cost-accounting approach adopted reflects the 'sustainable business' narrative of management. The emphasis is upon integration of social, environmental and

economic issues, but not on the institutional imperatives that make this problematic. At the same time, the motif is for New Zealand to become a 'world leader' (MfE, 2001) and a 'champion' (MFAT, 2002) in sustainable development, which smacks of business 'branding' and is reminiscent of a New Zealand trait remarked upon by one of the participants of wanting always to be 'the best' ('The reality is, we're not', SSSB). The government paper that preceded the New Zealand Report to the WSSD encapsulates the concept as:

- Looking after people;
- Taking a long-term view;
- Taking into account effects on social, cultural, economic and environmental dimensions; and
- Participation and partnerships (Government Report on Sustainable Development, 2002).

These are principles whereby government could construct a basis for an inclusive strategy of sustainable development for New Zealand. Sustainable development is defined as 'an approach to decision-making' (p. 11), and the paper provides 'Draft Principles' and 'A Vision for New Zealand' (p. 12).[220] It drew strong criticism from the mainstream business groups interviewed for the research:

> '...there in the lead point [of the above paper] is the *extraordinary* statement that *the government embraces the concept of sustainable development* – it doesn't explain *what particular concept* of sustainable development they are embracing – and that it will underpin all policy development: and that's it ... it goes back to *the government appropriation of sustainable development.*' (BusinessNZ, emphasis added).

The New Zealand Report to the WSSD, a 'round-up' of what the country had achieved since UNCED, prepared by the MfE, contained little about sustainable development, possibly reflecting the status of the concept over the previous decade. In the meantime, the promised public participation has still not taken place. Officials in the Prime Minister's Office originally advised that this would be conducted prior to the WSSD, then after the Earth Summit; but participation has now been indefinitely postponed. The Sustainable Development Strategy for the country was

[220] *Draft Principles and Vision: Government Paper on Sustainable Development* 2002.

eventually replaced with the much more managerial approach of an 'Action Plan'[221] (February, 2003), focusing on major areas of energy, water, air and children and youth. Public debate is now promised once this plan has begun to evolve, which appears to overlook the purpose of democratic participation. This essentially managerial plan is focused on the concept of the 'sustainable city'; and Auckland, with its combination of decrepit infrastructure, levels of disengagement and poverty among young people, rapidly rising population of young Maori and Pacific Islanders and its capacity to flex political muscle (added to the fact that the PM's constituency is in Auckland) has been selected as the model for the Plan. The Plan reinforces 'management' as the key to 'political sustainability'; but it is also interesting in terms of my research into hegemonic coalitions that it essentially calls for better understanding and 'management' of sustainable development issues by *government agencies* and improved collaboration between these. On the surface, this appears to shift the focus away from the 'business-driven' discourse that has been fostered by the business-government coalition to a discourse of government responsibility, 'management' and leadership. It may signal a desired distancing of government, away from the narrow and constraining business perspective.[222]

As noted, government policy on sustainable development has earned it some criticism from business – partly for its social goals, but also for its 'appropriating' the concept. This critique signals the rootedness of the attitudes and the power of conservative thinking in New Zealand; and how criticism of a left-leaning government is never far from the surface of business' thinking. It arose chiefly from the conservative lobby, and, as already indicated, was echoed by some managers. Members of the conservative group were convinced that there was 'a pre-ordained agenda in action' which signalled 'core governmental political institutionalisation' of the concept, and which had produced 'this industry of sustainable development,'

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[221] A close analysis of Government documents from 2001 onwards reveals that, from the start, the Government was proposing 'practical steps' *prior* to a 'New Zealand Strategy' (PM's speech, June 2001, (CAB(00)M17/ID(1)), preparing the way for the managerial Action Plan in advance of the discourse. This was not so evident when the documents were read in the context of the supposedly imminent Strategy.

[222] Pyrrhonian scepticism prevents me from overlooking the fact that the Auckland-based NZBCSD has a number of projects focusing on children and youth, and has targeted Energy, Air and Water as issues for its attention.

(BusinessNZ). The 'espousal' of sustainable development by government was seen to be 'largely driving the whole notion of sustainable development,' (BusinessNZ). As noted, this was summed up as 'the government appropriation of sustainable development'; and led to criticism of educational packages on climate change produced for schools by the MfE; the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol; and, especially, the fact that government was liaising with a limited group of business participants. The case was made that government should 'actually start talking to the people who ... are *"the other participants"* in sustainable development ... the "*deliverers*",' (BusinessNZ). This referred not only to 'business organisations', but the 90% or more of companies in New Zealand that are SMEs. It underlines that the 'coalition' had not gone unnoticed by industry, although they were apparently not aware of how that coalition had been instituted; and marks the fear of a shift in institutional thinking at government level:

> 'if we're talking about politics as a sort of institutional thing, I see that as the most powerful and profound [support for sustainable development] because, without that [government support], would we be debating sustainable development at all*? It is the espousal by governments that is driving the notion of sustainable development.'* (BusinessNZ, emphasis added).

This was also put into the (realistic) context of competition by the 'sustainable development industry' for funding or for influence over the agenda. One of the participants from the organisation noted: 'it's clear to me that these are corporations who have decided: "Right, we're going to capture sustainable development. We're going to grab it and say: This is us. We're sustainable." ' (Business NZ).

Other criticisms surfaced, some from managers themselves. These, again, opposed the 'leftist' orientation of government, and also put a much stronger 'business' case than the NZBCSD has yet (publicly) proposed:

> 'if they [government] genuinely believed their threats about climate change they would reduce income tax and put it all on carbon tax. But that's horribly socially regressive, and they'll never do it because they're a left-leaning government who wish to redistribute wealth, not actually change behaviour.' (EM, Primary Production).

Several managers suggested that changes could be made to the corporate tax structure to make it easier for corporations to be able to afford environmental responsibility. Overall, managers were wary that government would introduce more

legislation and the accompanying bureaucracy; and clearly hoped that some voluntary steps towards sustainable development might ward off this threat.

8.4 The 'Business Case' for Sustainable Development

Chapter Seven argued that, while an appearance of contestation is produced, the 'business case' and the 'mainstream' case both legitimate the dominant structures that construct and support capitalist business. These positions, with their complementary though disputed ideologies, appear set to represent the agenda of sustainable development in New Zealand. The 'contestation' between them may even replace the needed contestation around the eco-modernist/business-as-usual paradigm that a more inclusive and emancipatory discourse of sustainable development would encourage. The next section examines the agenda of sustainable development as it emerges from 'the business case', the mainstream business discourse and the conceptions of managers.

8.4.1 The '*Industry of Sustainable Development*': Business Coalitions and Appropriation

The NZBCSD's 'business case', based on the taken-for-granted role of economic growth, promulgates a strong 'managerial' case for 'growth', presented as 'doing good' ('doing good is good for business,' EA and Corporate Member, 2002). It does not deconstruct the model of economic growth, but assumes that companies can pursue old ways while being socially and environmentally responsible. No systemic or structural change is anticipated: it promulgates an unproblematical view of the relationship between economic growth, social equity issues and environmental care. It is a narrative that promotes self-interest served through 'win-win' solutions to problems and is calculated to counter anti-business discourse, which was an original goal of the WBCSD. The organisation's 'Vision and Business Case'[223] directly appropriates sustainable development to the managerial construct of economic growth: it presents environmental performance as part of business 'productivity', and sustainable development as a tool for successful management. The 'case' for

[223] www.nzbcsd.org.nz

sustainable development that is presented is the eco-modernist vision of business-as-usual, strongly focused on profit opportunities, with little discursive elaboration of the concept of sustainable development, and based on the precepts of:

- Business benefits;
- New business opportunities;
- New sources of value.

It would be quite problematic to explain how these, at face value, do anything but maintain the legitimacy of capitalist business. The precepts are intended to be consistent with 'sustainable development' principles, but add up to a case for 'competitive advantage' at best and accommodation of the sustainable development agenda. The Council's Sustainable Development Reporting (SDR) programme is designed to help companies to achieve the following:

- Increased financial return and reduced risk for shareholders;
- Attracting and retaining employees;
- Improving customer sales and loyalty;
- Growing supplier commitment;
- Strengthening community relations;
- Contributing to environmental sustainability.

Again, the goals are based on assumptions that support the traditional business and management model: that growth and increased performance are 'givens' and that sustainable development can be turned into a commodity to produce profit; that the cost of employee turnover is high and needs to be avoided; that improved 'brand' and reputation will lead to increased sales to 'loyal' customers; that suppliers might damage this reputation unless they, too, are managed; that the relationship with communities (and with government) can be strengthened, indicating the opportunity for a greater degree of hegemony over the life-world of people and capture of government policy-making; and, in terms of 'contributing to environmental sustainability', putting into place more eco-efficiency strategies. The case is based on 'risk' management and competitive advantage; it might be summed up as 'business-

better-than-usual' and it exemplifies the eco-modernist paradigm which business is best equipped to 'manage'.

Other indications of adherence to a modernist, '*maneggiare*', paradigm include the description of sustainable development as a 'strategy' as opposed to a set of principles that can shape (and thereby change) strategy. There is no discussion of the structural causes of unsustainability, no attention to the 'silences' of sustainable development; in fact, the construction of the case creates 'silences', expunging the radical aspects from the debate. The rhetoric employed rings with familiar business and business school jargon: the emphasis is upon 'Knowledge'; and being 'Responsive', 'Niche-focused' and 'Clustered'. The vision of society is of one that is 'Proactive, Educated, Networked, Diverse and Caring' (original capitals), with aims to 'stretch' goals for Waste Reduction, Air and Water Quality, Biodiversity and 'Restoration'. It is quite difficult to understand the role of the NZBCSD itself in some of these areas, bearing in mind the specialist agencies set up to deal with them, the nominated functions of the Council, and the generalist skills of its executive, nor is this spelled out anywhere. Several of the goals suggest a degree of angling for power or profit through the coalition with government. They reflect a very thorough invasion of the life-world of New Zealand that is not dissimilar to that exercised by the conservative NZBR which produces 'research' (often 'position' papers) on issues not apparently under it aegis. There is a tendency for NZBCSD documents to have an 'evangelistic' ring to them – the Council is 'Dedicated to Making a Difference', although the precise nature of the 'difference' emerges only through careful examination of its goals for business. Simplistic logo-phrases are used to sum up the Council's position on sustainable development. The overlap between economy, society and environment produces: 'New Zealand for ever', and 'Everyone walks the talk' – which could be accused of as much 'opacity' as the Brundtland definition. The interaction between economy and environment is characterised as 'Wealth is created sustainably'; and that between economy and society as 'Kiwis are confident and entrepreneurial'. No logo is suggested for the connections between environment and society,[224] which raises the question of whether this interconnection is seen as

[224] The heuristic employed for my research underlines how constrained the Council's discourse is: for example, the 'institutional' imperative of sustainable development and its interconnections with the economic, social and environmental imperatives are ignored.

irrelevant to business, since it appears to have no obvious 'economic' component; or whether it is too complex to 'manage'. Institutional issues are disregarded, possibly because of the spotlight this would direct on the capitalist means of production and consumption; or the belief that corporate managerialism can solve the problems. Economic growth is taken as a given. These oversimplifications may explain the charge of 'populism' that has been levelled at the sustainable development debate in New Zealand.[225] As constructions of sustainable development, they add little to the discourse; and, again, they are more notable for what is omitted than for what is said: but they 'manage' an agenda that is upbeat, confident and simplistic, creating faith in doing good through the dominant paradigm. It reinforces the fact that the NZBCSD is not set up to tackle the 'big issues' of sustainable development, as its genesis, the history of the WBCSD (see Chapters Three and Five), and their role in serving the interests of business underline. However, the 'evangelical' tone and iconic stance of its corporate leaders could lead the public to expect bigger issues to be on their agenda, including an examination of the nexus between business and sustainable development and its institutional aspects. The Sustainable Development Reporting (SDR) project itself is an example of the way that the NZBCSD encapsulates sustainable development in a paradigm of management. Like the international initiatives already in place in this area (UNEP-SustainAbility, 1994-present; Global Reporting Initiative/GRI, 2002) it implies that the major issue for business is to *manage* and *report on* sustainable development, abstracted from the context of broader institutional change.

Hegemony is exercised through the way the NZBCSD positions itself in society; and this sometimes surfaces in its dealings with its own corporate members (see Chapter Seven). Although the Council's reports are silent about its origins in New Zealand, and emphasize its increasingly strong links to the WBCSD, the relationship with MfE appears as a stamp of authority. Some lack of transparency in its operations is attracting criticism. For example, Milne et al. (2003) point out that in at least one case of corporate reporting that is part of the Council's SDR project, a member company's report has been verified by another member of the NZBCSD *and* of its SDR team, who is, additionally, employed by a company that acts as consultant to

[225] Chairman, State Sector Standards Board.

the one under verification. These associations are not stated.[226] Some of the case studies of member companies produced in the SDR guidelines raise questions. For example, a major retailer, now describing his business as '*sustainable* retailing', also makes the dubious claim of promoting 'sustainable consumption', evidently without irony. He refers to SDR as a 'shop window' where business can 'display' their 'triple bottom line' performance, which, perhaps unintentionally, underlines the real purpose of the Council. Nevertheless, there is an emerging belief, at government and business level, that members of the NZBCSD are, in fact, providing the leadership needed in New Zealand. A member of MFAT advised that members of the Council's Executive had been included in the official New Zealand delegation to Johannesburg, commenting:

> '... the organisations like the Business Council for Sustainable Development ... do lead business perceptions of what sustainable development is.' (MFAT).

From a Critical Theory perspective, the 'case' of the NZBCSD (and its parent, the WBCSD) exemplifies the critiques of eco-modernism discussed in Chapter Four. There is much 'evangelism' and not a little 'kitsch' (Newton and Harte, 1997); it is based on a 'greening of business paradigm' that presents a 'romantic narrative' (Newton and Harte, 1997), one which Marcuse (1964) would characterise as a 'totalising' narrative. There are reassuring tales of 'redemption and enlightenment' (Levy, 1997:135); but the case legitimates 'political sustainability' (Levy, 1997:126) and a strong case of 'reformism' (Merchant, 1992; Levy, 1997). Such critique underlines the opportunity lost through the 'business case' being substituted for sustainable development with the consent of the Ministry for the Environment. This has kept a tame, conservative, pragmatic agenda to the fore – 'weak sustainable development' (PCE, 2002b) - which, at the same time, suggests reasons why the business case has been readily adopted at both government and corporate levels. The emotive trouncings delivered to the Council by the conservative business fora (in particular the NZBR) hardly rate, since this agenda is actually reinforcing their own; although it has the nuisance value of tinkering with an ideological agenda that they abhor. However, the contestation that has begun to appear from the Office of the

[226] Ball, Owen and Gray (2000:2) point out the dearth of independence of verification, and the 'managerial turn' it has taken, distorting the 'green discourse'.

PCE, from academia and from some critical representatives of business indicates that the radical agenda of sustainable development is not yet buried in New Zealand. Since narratives are constitutive, it is not possible to be sure that the pursuit of hegemony through the business case will succeed. It could be argued that its apparent failure to effect any real change provides a position for more radical proponents of sustainable development to 'resist' or 'struggle' against where none previously existed.

As with the 'government case', criticism of the 'business case' and the NZBCSD surfaced in the course of the research. The critique from the conservative business lobby has been discussed (Chapter Seven); but the severest commentary was that which arose from within the ranks of the sustainable development industry itself. Clearly, rifts have occurred during the brief existence of the Council, from its reformulation after little more than twelve months, to a 'difference' that engages leaders of the wider group, with a certain degree of attendant unpleasantness. This rift no doubt explains the acrimonious tone of some observations made about the Council and its parent body, the WBCSD. One person had become convinced that these groups were 'all about stopping governments from legislating,' (CDL). Their programmes were dismissed as 'little projects' that were infinitesimal compared with 'what they are doing as an organisation, churning along in the same old business model'. The Council was perceived as 'the perfect venue for letting a vast deal of corporations off the hook,' whereas it was suggested that they should be *challenging* corporate behaviour (although this was never their purpose, beyond 'challenging' corporations to adopt the eco-efficiency project). The government-business coalition was exposed: 'The government just loves having this group to talk to,' (CDL). While animosity and emotion colour these comments, it is interesting to observe that this critique from 'inside the camp' reflects something of the origins of the NZBCSD, and its key role as an industry front group to form a controlling alliance with government and to appropriate the agenda of sustainable development. This is not necessarily fully understood by the corporates who are members, or the Executive team that acts as administrators for the Council: but it does, perhaps, explain the protective, non-inclusive behaviour that has been commented upon.

For now, the Council's 'business case' represents the 'acceptable face' of the growth paradigm to which conservative business more openly subscribes. It was established at a time when business was threatened with mandatory environmental reporting, bracing itself for the financial implications of the new HSNO (1996) legislation, and possibly feeling that it 'ought' to be doing some things differently. It provides companies with a means of looking as if they are doing something – and in some ways they are – without tackling substantive issues. At the same time, the mainstream case is also strong, promulgated by the NZBR, BusinessNZ, and other forceful business leaders.

8.4.2 'Mainstream' Business Perspectives

'Sustainable development' has been a recent feature on the Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce agendas.[227] In a paper to a Rotary Conference and in individual interviews for this research, one businessman, a CEO and Chairman of a number of powerful organisations,[228] pinpointed New Zealand's economic decline as its major crisis. Economic growth was seen not only as compatible with sustainable development but the necessary precursor to environmental and social improvements. Asked about the 'silences' of sustainable development, like others from the conservative viewpoint, he pinpointed the major silence - the issue that gets overlooked or ignored – as 'the need for growth'.

> 'People [in New Zealand] want the high standard of living and the higher standard of public sector services but they don't recognise that New Zealand is a slow-growth economy and at the same time they are heavily committed to protecting the environment. That's not a sustainable package ...' (CEO, Mining Company).

Lacking the emotive tenor of some conservative commentary, this participant nevertheless presented the same construction of sustainable development, first of all conflating it with environmental responsibility; and then basing its attainment on robust economic performance. The current state of New Zealand's economy was attributed to the lack of vision and leadership at government level – with '*occasional*

[227] Two participants had given papers in these contexts (McDonald, 2002; Kerr, 2002) and sent these to me for comment.

[228] For example, the State Sector Standards Board; Japan/New Zealand Business Council.

brief exceptions', which appeared to refer to the period of free-market liberalism when many of the current corporate leaders assumed their power. The slow rate of growth accounted for the 'deterioration' in the quantity and quality of 'personal consumption' of both private and public sector goods and services, which included health and education services. It was not considered that these needs might be met through re-prioritisation, or that personal consumption was something that a sector of the public might reduce: the argument was based upon an *a priori* view of the need for economic growth. The social agenda of sustainable development surfaced chiefly as a kind of 'spectre' of the dysfunctional society that could be feared if the economy was not grown, rather than an issue of equity. The agenda of sustainable development became 'shifted' during the interviews: it was (as with the NZBR) reconstructed in the image of economic growth, which was presented (against the weight of considerable evidence) as the solution to social and environmental problems. The interesting thing is not just the content of such arguments, but the facility and assurance with which they are mustered, and with which opposing arguments are steadfastly ignored rather than contested. What surfaced was the accustomed hegemony that business has enjoyed over many kinds of public discourse; and the 'right' and ability of corporate managers to determine what the vision for the country should be. This was not transmitted with arrogance; nor were such participants anything but thoughtful and sincere in their contributions: they simply subscribed to their own hegemonic view and believed the case they supported was obvious and for the public good. Skill and practice were demonstrated in the ability to subvert the sustainable development agenda of the research discourse to one of 'management', turning the course of the interview to their own agenda; and it was sometimes necessary to go with such diversions until the opportunity occurred to pull the interview back to my intended schedule. However, it would also have to be said that, perhaps unwittingly, more was sometimes revealed when the agenda had been 'subverted'.

A major discursive turn in this interview was the extended thesis that what New Zealand needed was not sustainable development, but *better management* that would 'fix' the problems. This was perceived as the crucial deficit in the private and public sectors; and a model of effective management was offered from the participant's own company. It comprised a very interesting account of an inclusive approach to

management and training whereby people at shop floor level participated in training workshops with senior staff and had the opportunity to express ideas and opinions – even *'step up in their overalls'* and lead part of the workshop (although a senior manager would step in if things got out of control). This was presented as a 'democratic' involvement of workers, and is something akin to the involvement in decision-making that unionism is currently advocating and that the new SHEA (2002) legislation requires. It would take further research to determine how 'empowered' workers in the process really became, or whether it actually (and not necessarily intentionally) introduced more surveillance into their life-world, more 'control' over them, and better 'management' of their contribution to the company. It also provided a very convenient discursive turn in the discussion on sustainable development, but one that was not without relevance to the research.

The most important thing for this and other participants from the business interviews was to protect the dominant paradigm and to promote sustainable development as achievable without fundamental change to current social and economic structures. This meant that sustainable development was consistently replaced with the traditional discourse of management. It was simply a matter of 'managing' things better; and this generally led to the importance of eco-efficiency as a function of effective management. The rebuilding of economic growth in New Zealand was prioritised over the evident social damage that resulted from the short-lived 'boom' of the 1980s-1990s, with no anomaly conceded:

> 'You've got to have a level of economic performance that enables that [social and environmental responsibility].' (CEO, Mining Company).

No conflict between the neo-classical growth paradigm and sustainable development was acknowledged, apart from the sometimes open and sometimes covert implication that sustainable development was itself a redundant concept. No institutional change was considered necessary apart from better ('harder'/'drier') management and leadership; while government intervention should be kept to a minimum. The major difference between this position and the 'business case' is that the proponents of the latter, following the WBCSD, have seen fit to attempt to influence government, not through opposition, but through coalition. It also has to be recalled that such government-business coalitions are not new constructions; and the conservative

business people interviewed for my research had all been significant figures in such coalitions with different shades of government in the past.

8.5 The Business Case and Appropriation

The preceding discussion of the 'government' and 'business' cases reveals the 'pegs in the ground' for sustainable development in what amounts, at present, to the official discourse. Narratives constructed at government level and through the government-business coalition have the power to promote or to repress and discipline the concept. Where little multiplicity of perspectives – from business or the public – is encouraged through participation and little account taken of traditional indigenous perspectives, the capture will be more complete: it will avert significant contestation of the narrow rationality of the capitalist economy that helped to create the problem of unsustainability. However, as has been demonstrated, this 'appropriation' has not gone without comment and criticism. In New Zealand, it appears that democratic discourse is simulated through government and coalition narratives which exclude the majority but speak in an 'inclusive' way as though for all of us, promoting 'management-as-usual' without deconstructing the meta-narrative of the capital/labour relations that 'strong' sustainable development challenges. The construction depends on '*managers*-as-usual', and this section examines how corporate managers may themselves be constructed while believing they are promoting sustainable development. It is not suggested that this strategy is deliberately planned, although it is clear that some thoughtfulness went into the formation of the coalitions. New Zealand is, historically, a public-service oriented economy, essentially gripped by a management paradigm. The period of free-market neo-liberal enterprise – absorbed as readily by government agencies and state-owned enterprises as the private sector – appears to have strengthened the managerial grasp (although not necessarily managerial effectiveness, particularly in the state sector, as the CEO quoted above confirmed). With the collapse of much manufacturing, the economy now looks to technology and innovation to manage the country out of its economic trough: sustainable development is one of the management tools expected to provide 'solutions'.

In this section, I re-examine the corporate interview data for evidence of a focus on sustainable development presented as 'management' to perpetuate the capitalist model of production and consumption - the model upon which managers themselves are largely dependent, and which, as 'managers', they support. This evidence conveys more of a dialogue than can emerge from the documents, providing the opportunity to clarify the meanings behind the statements. One sub-set reveals that faith in management and the invincibility of the capitalist model is deep-rooted and taken-for-granted, although not totally uncontested. This sometimes emerged as confidence in the trickle-down theory of wealth-creation and in the ability of the economy to distribute general wealth - it simply meant there had to be enough 'growth' to go around:

> 'the wealthier you make the poorer people, the wealthier you'll become. It doesn't actually mean that you denude your wealth by enriching them ... it's one of the absurdities ... of some of the discussions on development and resources and wealth transfer that, actually, it's not necessarily wealth transfer, it's wealth creation.' (CM, Oil Company).

For another participant, sustainable development played an important part in 'protecting reputation and relationships', in providing financial security by providing 'predictability of resource supply' and averting business risk: 'If we affect a country in such a [negative] way economically or through bad performance in terms of extraction ... the market has gone for us,' (SCSHE, Oil Company). By and large, people did not anticipate that any major change to the political economy was required – 'I don't think you have to make radical social change,' (BusinessNZ). Asked if we could move towards sustainable development within current social and economic arrangements, the tendency was towards automatic and positive responses, even some challenging of the question: '[W]hat actually have we managed to run out of through exploitation? And have we actually run out, or have we simply moved on to something that's more effective?' (BusinessNZ). Others saw the need for change, but it was in order to be able to continue business-as-usual, which they saw was threatened:

> 'unless we change our behaviour individually and collectively we will not be able to produce the goods and services that people want.' (CPM, Telecommunications).

Much of the emphasis was upon maintaining growth, with sustainable development seen as a means for this:

> '... the ability to grow indefinitely ... is what sustainability is about. It's a time ... for companies to look at themselves and say how are they delivering the value. Is it in a sustainable manner or not? You cannot indefinitely carry on a business that isn't sustainable ... [and] growth is not a bad thing ... if you're growing in the right culture then inherently it will be sustainable.' (GM-A, Electricity Utility).

This, I believe, encapsulates the basic struggle corporate managers were experiencing. As they came to some understanding of sustainable development, they strived to fit it into their accustomed management paradigm – to think of it in the same terms as business-as-usual and as a way to perpetuate business growth. There was, again, the belief that 'companies seeking to focus on costs' would see the *sense* of sustainable development for their production processes; and a way of 'ensuring our ability to grow at the rate that the shareholder is demanding on a continuous basis ... [and] ... if we do not do it in a sustainable manner, we will not be in business in the long term. It's as simple as that,' (GM-A, Electricity Utility). The changes, however, were to be made incrementally – 'in small, meaningful steps', echoing the incrementalist approach of the WBCSD's eco-efficiency model.

It was difficult at times to elucidate exactly how managers were constructing sustainable development (or sustainability), as a number of the quotations illustrate. They tended to slip in and out of different constructions, generally coming back to growth and business viability as the 'key' features. I attribute this to their passing through a transitional or pre-paradigmatic stage, perhaps one where they were pulled in different directions by the contradiction between their participation in the research process and the everyday reality of corporate life. Some contestation also arose as they reflected upon the model within which they worked, sometimes in order to defend the model against any level of deconstruction that the research process was introducing to the discourse; but also to critique former, taken-for-granted attitudes:

> 'the growth is actually the result of an efficiency model ...[and] the model's pretty closely aligned to human motivation; and human nature's not going to go away. I think to try and turn that around is like trying to tell someone not to strive more or work harder or do better because we're all equal.' (SP, Manufacturing).

The same participant stressed that consumers support the model, perhaps an example of business laying the responsibility for continuing with the status quo on the consumer:

> '... the capitalist model is supported by four million New Zealand consumers that go and vote with their dollars every day.' (SP, Manufacturing).

Similar comments were made by others – that human nature (which, it was pointed out, is 'closely aligned to rats', EM, Primary Production) was at the base of the model; and that the underlying problem was 'just greed'. Attempts to deconstruct a model that had been regarded as 'given' led to confusion, for example:

> 'Democracies create free markets and free markets basically pick winners and losers ... I think [sustainable development] almost needs a dictatorship,' (CPM, Telecommunications).

The discomfort that deconstruction of the dominant model created also led to some defence of its efficacy. One participant factored this in by suggesting that a 'silence' of the discourse was the reality that the dominant model had brought great advances to human life:

> 'Another thing that's unspoken that I think is missing from the debate [is] actually the *massive advances we've had from industrial society* and – sure – it's not equitably spread around the world – but *the world is still a much better place* in terms of people's fulfilment and life. And most of that is the efficiencies driven out of all the things that are now being deemed as bad.' (SP, Manufacturing).[229]

The question arose of whether business had 'appropriated' the concept, as the international literature maintains. This participant also reacted against that suggestion:

> 'I think that's harsh, even of international businesses ... it's a bit like ... criticising them for their efforts, because their efforts don't measure up to what Utopia is.' (SP, Manufacturing).

Somewhat in keeping with Hawken's former stance (1993 and Chapter Four), he maintained that, if there *had* been any hegemonic appropriation of sustainable

[229] As Marcuse pointed out (1964), the dominant model makes life very comfortable and seductive for at least some sections of the populace (Chapter Two).

development, then business was likely to make a better success of it than other contestants, particularly government:

> '... the other thing is ... when business does get hold of something and does it, just because of their size and the influence they've got in both market-places and among their shareholders, when they start to discuss [sustainable development] it will probably have a better, quicker distribution.' (SP, Manufacturing).

This did not take account of what 'version' of sustainable development business would be 'distributing', or how this might reify its own role as the essential 'manager' of sustainable development. However, another participant was quite clear that such appropriation was taking place:

> 'I think corporations *have* hijacked sustainable development. It seemed quite a radical, out-there, concept three to five years ago, but now it is so diluted that every company is comfortable talking about it and think they're sort of doing it. But the reality is we are not even close to what the original concept was.' (EC, Retailing).

To an extent, people recognised that they were vulnerable: caught up in a dominant model they took for granted as being 'good' for society - providing employment, some choices, essential services; although, as noted, several members of the group had learned how swiftly they could become surplus to its requirements ('You're always under the scrutiny of nameless, faceless shareholders. You're expendable,' EM, Primary Production). Even a strong supporter of the business case and its ability to deliver profit, a member of the NZBCSD, acknowledged the hegemony of the dominant model:

> 'it's very hard to get away from the concept that the almighty dollar in profit, or short-term profit, is what's important.' (DSM, Water Utility).

Managers had experienced severe changes dictated by structural issues such as share performance, and had seen gains in corporate 'sustainable development' disappear:

> 'we've undergone a huge slimming down in the last year where some 1,100 people have gone out of the workforce of eight or nine thousand; Corporate SHE has all but disappeared. They always tell you that any organisation needs some corporate memory – well, it will be interesting to see how sustainable development [thrives] - whether it's possible without that core group.' (SHEA, Chemicals).

This participant had found himself attempting to maintain sustainable development on the company agenda 'by stealth'. Possibly it was this sense of vulnerability that led participants to describe sustainable development, or, at least, the 'business case', almost as a way to 'shore up' capitalism – to sustain growth – even, perhaps, to make themselves less expendable. There seemed to be a tacit concern that sustainable development would, in fact, *not* be 'good' for business. Consequently, growth as the driver emerged as a strong theme in the interviews, and the power of the model to produce 'consent' was indicated in some accounts of sustainable development as a means to producing more growth: '... it's *sustainable growth* that you have to look at ... the new business drivers are *all about growth,*' (GM-A, Electricity Utility).

Sometimes, the discomfort of considering the paradigm within which they worked led participants to have recourse to the 'business case' to provide its justification; and there was ample use of the rhetoric of eco-modernism: 'doing more with less'; 'creating affluence without effluence'; '[having] a licence to operate'; 'absolute financial spin-offs': it was clear that the business case made the dominant paradigm look more attractive. These participants also saw 'strong management' as being fundamental, possibly, as posited, to safeguard their own positions as managers; but this concern was also directed at executive level, where, clearly, some of them would have appreciated stronger leadership for sustainable development or even environmental management. Emphasis was placed upon management and governance: 'You need really strong management systems. You need strong corporate governance. You need strong management,' (DSM, Water Utility); culture change: 'it needs to be a culture that has to be created,' (GM-A, Electricity Utility); and strong strategic direction: 'A company that's weak in terms of sustainability is probably going to be weak strategically ...' (CPM, Telecommunications). However, the fact that these aspects of a well-functioning traditional model are well-developed in companies does not necessarily signify a major shift towards sustainable development.

Occasionally people reflected on how the business model was to be reconstructed, acknowledging the fundamental contradiction that sustainable development unfolds:

> 'the particular thing I've been struggling with is the question of whether a sustainable development concept or commitment is one which involves

> fundamental change to the way we do business. Do we as an individual company ... in the context of national or international sustainable development commitments, need to effectively stop any use of hydrocarbons ...?' (DCS, Gas Utility).

Further counter-hegemonic contestation that arose from the interviews is examined in Chapter Nine: it formed a strand of the research constructed by relatively few participants who critiqued the capitalist model and the business case's focus on profit as 'doing good' while gaining positive PR. Fundamentally, the means of production and consumption went uncontested or was defended. Even a participant who had become quite critical of the dominant model nevertheless acknowledged the *seduction* of that model when it was working, which I believe is an important factor to be taken into account:

> '... in a sick kind of way, that excites me.' (EC, Retailing).

As Foucault points out, we would not otherwise submit to the power of the model if it did not have some attraction for us; and it underlines Marcuse's point that the model provides at least some people with benefits such as this 'excitement' which makes it difficult to resist.

It was interesting that contestation, although quite limited, emerged relatively quickly once the opportunity had been created through the research process. Participants started to reflect on the causes of over-population, rather than just blaming the third world for this; and considered the issue of poverty more keenly. Although social issues generally did not surface without some prompting, participants were not indifferent to these concerns. Sometimes they simply had not thought about such things; or they had kept these as part of their 'personal' agenda – something they did not take to work with them. Companies, by and large, do not represent arenas where managers debate the role and nature of economic growth, social disparity, or whether growth has delivered on its promises. Sustainable development raises these uncomfortable spectres. The 'business case' is a model for 'managing' sustainable development while continuing to shield business from these dilemmas, re-legitimising corporate power. Although some discussion of broader issues arose during the research, it has to be recalled that the participants in the core group of managers had become used to working together in an unusually unrestricted environment with some features of an 'ideal speech situation'. It provides one small

example of the robust discourse that may emerge when the *opportunity* for participation is provided – but it also reveals that this cannot be 'controlled', which may explain why little public participation has yet been introduced in New Zealand. Similarities and tensions arose between the written and spoken accounts. This section has focused chiefly on the similarities of the two discourses: Chapter Nine explores the tensions and the emergence of some counter-hegemonic discourse.

8.6 Concluding Comments

The examination of the ways in which the agenda of sustainable development is being 'managed' by different agencies reveals the tacit construction of an eco-modernist agenda in New Zealand which reflects a 'weak' conception of sustainable development. It is supported at government and corporate levels, and by the newly emerged sustainable development front groups. The narratives appear to have been constructed with 'good intention', with little conception of reifying traditional hegemony, even with the hope of emancipating a 'better business model' and a better way of life. However, the discourse lacks conceptual problematisation of the fundamental causes of unsustainable development; and it is controlled by a small coalition of interests. No radical reformulation of the business model is envisaged: indeed, little conception is voiced of the current model being unsustainable. Politically, it is likely that New Zealand is currently governed by a party more likely to appreciate the complementarity between 'strong' sustainable development and it own social equity agenda; and possibly having longer-term goals for pursuing that agenda. However, the contestation already apparent between government goals of equity and sustainability and mainstream business signals the vulnerability of government; and the coalitions formed between government agencies and the business case lobby possibly foreshadow what could become a more pervasive capture of the government agenda than conservative business could currently mount.

At the beginning of my thesis, I mooted the idea that the 'business case' lobby might represent the catalyst for change towards a more radical model of sustainable development. Closer examination of that case suggests that such change is unlikely to evolve from *within* the business case; but there is, perhaps, a possibility that the

case itself may provide an *unanticipated* site for contestation. While it appears to have an obfuscatory role, it also raises consciousness about some aspects of sustainable development and places before the public a model that claims to be different, but which clearly supports the structural hegemony that is at the base of unsustainability. Taking Paine's argument that there resides in all populations a 'mass of sense lying in a dormant state' (in Wainwright, 2003), it might be assumed that, through a broader, participatory discourse, the obfuscatory device might itself be held up as a 'mirror' to society and business (O'Connor, 1998). The business case *itself*, critically assessed, might provide a lens to examine fundamental causes of unsustainable development that are not squarely addressed by eco-modernist constructions of eco-efficiency. Broader discourse might make it possible to seize the benefits the model *can* clearly provide, employing these in a broader, more inclusive and emancipatory discourse of sustainable development.

Chapter Nine

'A Site of Political Struggle'

The sea, I think, is lazy.
It just obeys the moon
- All the same I remember what
Engels said: 'Freedom is the
consciousness of necessity.'
Ian Finlay: *'Mansie Considers the Sea in the Manner of Hugh MacDiarmid'*

9.1 Introduction

A level of reflexivity emerged from the research process which saw some of the corporate actor-participants re-positioning themselves and their thoughts and arguments in terms of the themes raised and the conceptual space opened up. At the same time, not all responses had initially emerged from the 'weak' (functionalist/mainstream) end of the sustainable development continuum. There was, from the start, evidence of a more radical understanding by some people than the one perpetuated by the business case. Other views changed and moved along the continuum towards the 'strong' pole; and something akin to a 'site of political struggle' emerged where counter-hegemonic views vied with more conservative ones. For some, as was indicated in Chapter Eight, this created an uncomfortable and confusing dialectical process and a transitional phase, where conceptions of sustainable development began to open up that extended beyond strategies to support business growth. Several participants found themselves straddling different positions and hovering back and forth between them. It was uncomfortable for them to critique the structures upon which they were dependent, and to which they were accustomed and generally loyal. Moreover, opening up a dialectical process for conceptualising sustainable development does not in itself change the hegemonic values and practices of the workplaces that participants depend upon. Nor is it assumed that these changing perceptions have no power of agency in those settings: their final effect may be incalculable.[230]

[230] Foucault, 1973; 1977; Hajer, 1995; Harvey, 1996.

Counter-hegemonic views (or, at least, questioning, sceptical and exploratory positions) which arose from documents and interviews with people in the broader context fall into a different category. Documents do not provide the dialectical interchange of interviews; and participants interviewed on an individual basis were also less subject to the discursivity that characterised the group meetings, although it was still possible to check out meanings and explore themes and reactions. The views of these participants tended, therefore, to fall into one of two categories: they either subscribed to the mainstream conservative view that was generally suspicious and sceptical of sustainable development and those who promoted it; or they belonged to a small group that questioned the status quo, sometimes reflecting the kind of professional position they occupied (such as in a union organisation, a community development agency or academia); and sometimes the kind of people they were – possibly left-leaning, philosophical by nature or supporting values which favoured a 'softer', more equitable perspective on life, less focused on consumption.

The engagement with a wide range of actors, and the close and ongoing relationship with the core group of managers also meant that there was scope provided for themes to emerge that were not originally part of the research schedule, or which were implicit within its structure; and these provide some interesting insights into and elaborations of the conceptual context of sustainable development for managers in companies. Section 9.2 returns to key documents to explore whether counter-hegemonic or 'stronger' views of sustainable development are being set on record. Section 9.3 examines the contestation that arose during interviews with informants from the broader contextual setting, and sets these within the research framework. Section 9.4 focuses upon counter-hegemonic views that were either immediately apparent or which began to emerge in the corporate interviews with managers, particularly from the core group meetings, with some evidence of a level of reflexivity developing within the research process. Section 9.5 discusses conclusions drawn from the responses and some emerging themes that indicate areas for future research.

9.2 Emerging Contestation: Written Accounts

Any 'strong' conception of sustainable development based on the need for fundamental structural and institutional change tended to emerge at academic and NGO level, slightly to the side of my selected research samples. However, a joint report commissioned by a multi-sectoral group[231]- '*Sustainable Development in New Zealand: Here Today, Where Tomorrow?*' (PRISM[232]/Knight, 2000) - is relevant to my research, as it presents one of the few cases that adhere to a 'strong' conception of sustainable development. It was also subsumed into the PCE's Report, '*Creating Our Future: Sustainable Development in New Zealand*' (2002b), which provides the strongest quasi-government critique of sustainable development, and the closest thing yet to a level of 'formal' contestation.[233] The PRISM/Knight report provides a more discursive account of the issues and meanings of sustainable development and the nature of New Zealand in terms of society, environment and economy, with an analysis of trends at the levels of central and local government, business, research and NGOs. It is an indication of a discourse developing in New Zealand that contests business-government domination of the agenda to date, but which is still not developed in the broader public domain. It identifies the gaps and barriers to advancing sustainable development, one of the chief of these being the lack of debate about different views of sustainability in New Zealand. It critiques the repression of a multiplicity of views and of horizontal conjunctions. This echoes a major focus of my research, where lack of discursivity emerges as one of the major 'silences' of sustainable development in New Zealand, raising the question of power over the discourse and over non-decision-making.

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[231] Sustainable New Zealand.

[232] Pacific Rim Institute of Sustainable Management.

[233] The PCE's Report itself has not gone without critique. It was forwarded by the PCE to New Zealand's former Minister for the Environment, Simon Upton, now Director of the Commission for Sustainable Development in Paris, who supplied his own critique of the Report on-line (Upton-on-line). Upton was Minister during much of the period criticised in the Report for lack of action.

The PRISM/Knight report also sets out the 'weak' and 'strong' dimensions of sustainable development. The 'weak' perspective identified[234] is depicted as resting on the assumption that sustainability can be incorporated into existing institutions, processes and programmes, calling only for current tools of regulation and economic instruments to be used more 'effectively', which reflects the 'government' and 'business' case (Chapter Eight). The 'strong' perspective outlined calls for fundamental change to the status quo, requiring radical reform. It is pointed out that using the tools designed for the current economic paradigm will, on its own, be insufficient to make the paradigm shift. However, it is also suggested that such tools of 'weak' sustainability must be used in the meantime, since those required for radical change are not fully evolved. This view, relying upon the extant and institutionalized managerialist tools favoured by government and business, fails to consider that such 'compromise' may lead to the accommodation of the sustainable development agenda by the status quo,[235] with the danger of further halting any radical discourse and legitimating government- and business-as-usual. This is the process the 'business case' promulgates: 'progressing' towards sustainable development while using the tools and procedures that business largely controls.[236] My research advocates that different 'tools' are needed to open up a 'silence we did not even know we were observing,' (Kureishi, 2003).

The report advocates a definition, based on Brundtland, that expands on the central issues of 'needs' and 'limitations', and proposes that, for New Zealand, a Treaty of Waitangi 'cultural' perspective is also needed.[237] However, on the vexed issue of

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[234] The weak-strong perspective presented in the Report parallels the 'weak-strong' heuristic developed in Chapter Five of my thesis. Although Knight's comments are not framed in a Critical Theory or Foucauldian perspective, they are, by nature, 'critical'.

[235] See Chapters Three and Five.

[236] See Chapter Five.

[237] The Treaty of Waitangi 1840 provides an overarching context for ongoing debate in New Zealand about the nature of sustainable development. Engaging with the concept must include relevant Maori concepts. Maori society articulates a concept of sustainable development that is integrative and relational, where ecosystems themselves have a spiritual aspect and humans are directly related to non-humans. Central to this is the Maori world-view built around a cosmology that links all parts of the earth and nature in family. All are bound together by *whakapapa* (genealogy, ancestry, identity with place), *hapu* and *iwi*. Constant to the bonds is *mauri,* the life-force that exists in all things. This life-force is but one aspect of a wider spiritual dimension to the world – of *wairua* (spirit) immanent in nature (PRISM/Knight, 2000, p. 9).

definition, it points out that the 'purpose' of definitions is to provide a conceptual framework within which to establish principles, not to pin down the concept to tight specifics or management (and see Chapter Seven). The focus is upon *a process of change* rather than a goal, with sustainable development conceived of as an 'ethical' construct. The key distinguishing feature of the report is that it introduces the 'institutional' dimension, which surfaced only rarely in the documents or the interviews. This reinforces the fact that the 'business case' is based chiefly on the relationship between the economic and environmental imperatives, with a nod in the direction of the environmental-social relationship, and with little if anything to say about the institutional relationships with the other three imperatives, or issues of justice and democracy. The institutional imperative focuses the PRISM/Knight report on the need for participatory decision-making processes and reinforces the conclusion, like my own, that lack of debate – 'silence' - about different views of sustainability in New Zealand is one of the chief barriers to progress (p. 7). The report also overviews some of the business initiatives at international level and in New Zealand, and the different perspectives that these represent. For example, the dichotomy is raised between 'natural capitalism'[238] seen as the key to delivering a sustainable future, and the opposing view that it represents a tactical move by big business to capture the agenda (p. 22). Another is the belief that commercial interests are the root cause of global environmental and social problems, contrasted with the opinion that business holds the key to tackling issues surrounding sustainability. The report points out that, by and large, government and business favour strategies that do not involve huge threats to the current living standards of rich countries, and that could even accelerate growth in living standards in poor countries. Such business strategies as The Natural Step (Chapter Five) are portrayed as having their place in terms of eco-efficiency: they provide necessary but not sufficient goals to be met; but they perpetuate mainstream views of globalisation and the economic policy limits of the 'new right'. The raison d'être of the WBCSD (and, by association, the NZBCSD) is critically assessed, their goals defined as being to:

- Avoid more substantial regulatory reforms; and to,
- Lead the next economic revolution based largely on new energy resources.

[238] See Hawken, et al. (1999) *Natural Capitalism: Creating the next industrial revolution.*

The dilemma the report exposes is the same as that of my research: how to critique 'positive' and 'practical' changes in the way business is done without dismissing their worth, while keeping in mind the more fundamental challenges that still need to be met; and how to determine whether such strategies are steps forward, or ways of actually hampering real progress. An even more critical view that is raised in my own research, but not in this report, is that of the deliberate *accommodation* of a potentially radical agenda. The report addresses the central contradiction that the business case blurs over: the relationship between consumer demand, the media, business reinforcement of this demand and political dependence upon this relationship. It underlines the fact that the degree of individual choice that can be exercised by people is limited, which raises the question of agency. Knight's vision of community-generated[239] conceptions of sustainable development based upon individual and community agency is discussed with other similar visions in Section 9.3.

The Report of the PCE's Office (PCE, August, 2002b) presents an overview incorporating several of the radical precepts of the PRISM/Knight report. The PCE Report consequently brought a somewhat more muscular notion of sustainable development and what it means to the broader 'formal' debate in New Zealand.[240] To some extent, it is a hybrid report, with the concepts from the PRISM/Knight report embedded in a framework of management-as-usual. Some of the rhetoric is difficult to distinguish from that of government departments and business groups with which the PCE's Office works closely, with an emphasis upon 'leadership', 'sustainability champions' and a framework of 'monitoring' and 'reviewing'; and it does more to promote the narrative of 'confusion' about the definition of sustainable development than to clarify its principles, reiterating nine times that the concept is difficult to define. The 'fundamental task' is identified of '*redesigning our socio-political*

[239] Knight's research and vision of a sustainable future for New Zealand has been based upon involvement in a number of community initiatives aimed at developing community-generated sustainable development - a 'revolution' that is being driven at community level.

[240] Upton-on-line (2002), however, largely dismisses the 'radical' aspect of the PCE's report, accusing the Commissioner of being influenced by some 'incautious enthusiasm'. Upton's critique, cogent, persuasive and with urbane elements of self-effacing humour, underlines the fact that the 'strong' case for sustainable development has to be stringently thought through and defended in order not to be easily demolished by the very well prepared conservative case.

system in ways that reintegrate the dependencies between people and our underpinning ecological systems' (Preface to Report, p. 3, emphasis added); and a 'strong' perspective is adopted that highlights the conflict between current ideologies, beliefs, values systems, economic theory and ecological constraints, although the report does not address these tensions.[241] It pinpoints the ideological commitment to market-driven solutions and government non-intervention that dominated central government in the 1990s as the major impediment to exploring alternative ways of meeting society's needs and developing wealth in more sustainable ways. The absence of government policy objectives or targets for sustainability is exposed; and a model of sustainability that recognises the economy as a *sub-set* of society is advocated (Executive Summary, p. 7). There is criticism – at least in the early part of the Report – of the dominant growth paradigm; of 'silo-thinking'; poorly integrated decision-making; inadequate co-operation between agencies and sectors and lack of structural and management incentives to work towards a more collective public good (p. 15); but this signals the turn to be made in the Report to 'management' issues.

The PCE Report represents a level of fighting talk from a quasi-government office. It replicates the 'strong' sustainability case as depicted in the Wuppertal 'Prism of Sustainability' (Appendix 9) with the 'institutional imperative' that calls for greater democracy, justice and burden-sharing (PCE, 2002b:36). However, the radical fire is largely consumed in the early part of an over-long report that is otherwise pre-occupied with 'business-as-usual'. For example, it turns to management solutions and the promotion of specific action plans for eco-efficiency: business initiatives, such as Triple Bottom Line and The Natural Step, and indicators and processes of monitoring and reviewing progress. It represents another example of contestation of the business discourse emerging in New Zealand, but is built upon a compromise with that discourse that sits uncomfortably with the ideological and socio-political shifts advocated in the early part of the Report.[242]

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[241] As an example of 'weak' sustainable development the Report cites the NZBCSD model of sustainable development built upon eco-efficiency, which does not call for institutional or structural change.

[242] The Report appears to have had little political impact on the Government policy paper on sustainable development (August, 2002), even though the PCE was involved in the prior debate (PM's office, personal communication, June, 2002).

9.3 Emerging Contestation: Accounts from the Business Context

In this section, I discuss 'strong' conceptions of sustainable development that emerged from interviews with key informants from institutions representing the broader political and social context of business, followed in Section 9.4 with positions emerging from the corporate interviews. These Sections include some counter-hegemonic views that question the dominant economic and business models, revealing a level of contestation that suggests that appropriation of sustainable development in New Zealand is by no means complete: it might increasingly become a 'site of political struggle'.[243] Such a struggle for sustainable development in the face of its current 'appropriation' may represent a suitable social movement within New Zealand, which, for all its conservatism and its control by technocratic élites[244] operating their own 'circles of conversation', is given to bursts of democratic, even radical, behaviour.[245] Such democratic values as this activity reflects, that might have made sustainable development a driving force for democratic discursivity, were, however, tipped off-course by the growth-and-consumerism ethos that has gripped much of the country, and the doubt about their future experienced by the increasingly poor (the 'inertia' referred to by Fussler, 2002, Chapter Five). The power of such latent democratic impulse may also explain precisely why public participation in the debate on sustainable development has so far been repressed. It is not possible to foretell what world will be constructed once people begin to speak; but we have experienced the discomfort for European New Zealanders as well as the social and economic implications of Maori finding their voice.[246]

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[243] A powerful hegemonic system can, however, accommodate a certain amount of opposition, which may even serve to legitimate its own dominance. It appears 'democratic' to allow a level of 'struggle' and contestation against a system which is robust enough to absorb this. However, as Harvey points out (1996, and see Chapter One), such projects as corporations and the systems they represent are themselves constructs that are more subject to change than they may foresee.

[244] See Chapter One.

[245] Examples include the Labour Party's anti-nuclear (and, therefore, 'anti-American') policy in the mid 1980s; the public outcry against apartheid through the anti-Springbok tour demonstrations in 1981; and the fact that the country produced one of the first 'green' parties – the Values Party – in the 1970s.

[246] Since the establishment of the Treaty of Waitangi Act (1975) and the Waitangi Tribunal (1975), Maori have become more empowered and some historical grievances have been righted. However, reaction against this empowerment resurfaces in New Zealand; and, as the empirical chapters of my thesis have shown, was also voiced at the corporate level.

The 'stronger' conceptions that arose in interviews with participants in the broader context tended to be produced by people who worked at the 'fringe' of the formal government-business context, although this was not exclusively the case. The interview with the representative of the NZCTU – even though the participant claimed that he and the union had not yet really got to grips with sustainable development[247] - immediately set the issues within the context of political economy and the 'strong' framework from the research matrix (Appendix 2). The concept was broadened from the balance between social, environment and economic issues to include the 'institutional' dimension, and it was seen as a 'robust' framework that could be applied to any level – 'a firm, an organisation, a community, an individual, nationally or internationally'. It was believed that the economic development debate in New Zealand would also be informed by sustainability concepts, 'particularly with a government of this shade'. Sustainable development was seen as a way to re-introduce some balance of values into New Zealand after the neo-liberal experiment of the 1980s and 1990s and the faith then perpetuated that 'everything sort of adjusts' to a neo-liberal economic imperative. This also led to an examination of the implications of globalisation: 'it does raise the notion that there should be some *bottom lines in terms of trade'*; and third world access to developed world markets was cited as an instance of asymmetric power: ('the hyprocrisy around trade access is quite incredible'). Other issues were 'the circumstances of market exchange'; the 'illegitimacy of the rich men's clubs'; the 'ethical' dimension of inequity in consumption; aid that 'turns into a debt problem'; and the reasons why 'the global institutions of world capitalism are coming under such pressure'. The original reasons for the coining of 'sustainable development' were also raised: 'the huge divide between developed and developing nations is thrown pretty much into sharp relief ... in terms of sustainable development'. This was, by and large, a very different discussion from the ones held with government and business representatives, reflecting the 'strong' dimension of the research matrix. It was suggested that what was inherent in sustainable development was a set of normative principles – already supported by the union movement – that were central issues for the concept: 'there's some things you say are absolutely wrong'. This included

[247] Subsequently, the NZCTU produced its document, *'Unions, Innovation and Sustainable Development'* (August, 2002).

international human rights issues of child labour and forced labour; but also government involvement in setting profitable market conditions that lead to unacceptable social and environmental outcomes (such as, in New Zealand, unemployment levels and people dependent on food-banks) which 'absolutely contradict the trickle down approach'. The domination of economic growth pursued in isolation from other dimensions of societal growth was highlighted; and the conclusion reached that:

> '... the concept of a 'developed' country may be the concept of a sustainable development programme being adopted in a country.' (CTU).

This reflects one of the premises of my research (see Chapter One): that sustainable development could supply the new meta-narrative for a more just social system based upon ecological sustainability. The focus of the participant was to push against structural and institutional limits, although this had proved difficult. The NZCTU had supported the establishment of an independent Sustainable Development Council to ensure greater democratic participation in the discourse, and a realistic assessment of why this had been rejected at government level was provided:

> 'It's quite a threatening thing politically, because you ... think, well, we're the government ... we get a mandate for three years; we go and do things, and if we have to go to this other group, well, we'll never do anything.' (CTU).

When asked about the economic and political climate that might encourage sustainable development, it was noted 'there's been a lot of space between unfettered capitalism and ... a very strong socialist opportunity ... there's so many things in the middle that I'd see sustainable development probably sitting across the middle ...'; which was one of the few responses to the question that did not bring about a reaction against perceived advocacy of a totalitarian state, or a confused, slightly embarrassed, silence. Comment was also made on the different perceptions of sustainable development promulgated in the North compared with the needs of the South: for example, the participant had attended OECD meetings in Paris where social 'indicators' were being determined, one being the not unimportant issue of security of income in retirement:

> 'What's this concept of security of income in retirement when you've got people starving in other countries?' (CTU).

As already indicated (Chapter Seven), the union movement, while welcoming aspects of the business case, was also suspicious of the level of self-promotion involved and whether business efforts went beyond this – for example, the fact that there was 'a fair bit of contestability' about some of the business measures employed; as well as the tendency for business' current focus on 'stakeholder engagement' to exclude the union movement. It was considered that companies would best respond to consumer pressure – 'market signals' – and that the potential existed in New Zealand for such pressure to develop because of general community support for environmental issues.[248] The fact that companies were promoting sustainable development as a 'good thing for business' was hotly contested:

> '... this's got to be good in itself for the environmental reasons, for the social reasons.' (CTU).

It was considered that New Zealand was still suffering from 'the conservatism of where we've been,' which meant that, after fifteen years of being told the market would take care of everything – with dire social and environmental consequences - people were apt to think, '[I]sn't it great that businesses are even saying the social [and] environmental things are important'. The conclusion was that we needed to be more 'hard-headed' about what that actually means: the 'business case' needed to be critiqued. Sustainable development was regarded as a relatively new area for unions, with the interview questions opening up some areas for engagement and some reflexivity in the research: 'I think you're exposing the fact that *I may have some opinions* on this; but I think you're probably [also] exposing the fact in this discussion that, *as a union movement*, we haven't thought enough about [it].' It was noted that the international union movement had had difficulty getting human rights issues – 'the social dimension' - further up the agenda, not only in preparation for the WSSD, but within developing countries themselves. The conclusion of the interview included a description of more sustainable ways of doing business in the future,

[248] In New Zealand, as elsewhere, public support for environmental issues waxes and wanes. There is, however, the abiding myth of 'clean, green' New Zealand – seriously questioned in recent years in terms of practice, but still almost a 'given' in the mores of New Zealanders.

which included ideas about co-operative ways of working, which will be discussed in Section 9.4.

A different kind of perspective, although with some essential points of agreement, came from a community development leader who had spent several years working as a key figure in a large company, employed to help it shift towards 'sustainable development'. There was, it appeared, a level of personal difference driving the comments made during the interview, and care is taken to reflect only the issues relevant to the research questions. One thing that seemed clear was that the participant himself had experienced a steep learning curve in terms of sustainable development during his work with the company, accessing much material and meeting key international people working in the business and sustainable development area. He had undergone a personal change, moving well beyond an understanding of eco-efficiency as being sufficient for business to claim it was 'sustainable'. Possibly his earlier background in community work, as well as a growing disenchantment with the business model, had encouraged what emerged as an alternative model of development, a 'Schumacherian' belief in small, community-based production and consumption based on the principle of subsidiarity: what was referred to as 'the proximity principle' and 'diversity':

> 'The best way for me to describe the condition of sustainability is the maximum number of people getting the maximum amount of their needs met within the shortest possible distance ... colleagues of mine in the community development arena call it the 'proximity' principle ... [the] principles of sustainability ... all revolve around community.' (CDL).

A case was made against the 'managerial' approach in favour of what was termed the '*in*efficiency' principle that 'actually makes up the social glue that holds the community together'; whereas, 'what modern corporates do is they strip out the social glue; they strip out the inefficiencies,' by introducing 'sterile system conditions'. The 'proximity' principle meant:

> 'you have the highest responsibility at the lowest level, with materials at the highest use within the shortest distance.' (CDL).

This model of production and consumption was not considered to conflict with the capitalist model, with which the participant said he had no difficulty: the capitalist model, the free market, profit, were not the problems, but the ways in which the

model was employed: 'society has to determine the limits of the franchise it'll give business to do whatever it wants to do'. The way in which the model had worked in New Zealand was scathingly attacked:

> 'It's the devil's ride for the short-term return on investment, quarterly reporting regime and those guys are looking over their shoulders every minute. The stock market's the only indicator those guys care about. If they can drive that model, if they can reach [for] a tool that helps that model better – which is what eco-efficiency and business sustainability is about – they'll reach for it.' (CDL).

This, in turn, led to a critique of the 'business case' and those who promulgate it. 'Eco-efficiency' was seen as insufficient: 'you've got to challenge *the whole system.*' The NZBCSD and its corporate members were perceived as failing to critique or understand the fundamental problem of 'hyper production and consumption patterns in society: all the problems spin out of that – that whole desire thing and more and more planned obsolescence.' Instead, they were seen as promoting consumption and consumerism under a guise of sustainable development. These and the 'mega-stars' of sustainability – people internationally renowned for promoting the business case – 'haven't challenged the business community to make the real steps that were going to move them towards sustainability'; and the business case itself was seen as intractable and irresponsible:

> 'It's like an elephant. You put an elephant in a delicate eco-system – it can have the nicest temperament; it can be the loveliest, well-trained elephant in the world – but you put it into a delicate ... area and it will be irresponsible. And I have come to truly believe that large companies, by nature of their size, are irresponsible.' (CDL).

The conclusion this participant had reached was that business could not be trusted; it would not do the right thing voluntarily unless it was a project that would save money. People who worked for big companies had 'sold' themselves for forty or fifty hours a week – and 'during that time they have to be part of the monster', living 'a collective lie' that is taking society away from sustainability. These bitter conclusions led to some self-criticism as well as criticism of company practices:

> 'putting a bull-shit statement together in their annual report to placate and soothe ... just syrupy language which *people like me* have helped people to

> write ... in the belief that *by saying it you might actually get them to do it: but they don't.'* (CDL, emphasis added).[249]

The impacts of the 'industrial machine' on the community as the machine itself became more 'efficient' was seen as profoundly destructive:

> 'it keeps spinning off local people as just inputs in terms of purchasing, but [with] no integration into the economy ... we're creating a whole lot of people who are just inputs into the system. They're being reduced down to this consuming entity ... controlled by distant shareholders who don't care about the community people live in.' (CDL).

What was painted was a picture of one-dimensional life as it has taken hold in New Zealand, especially since the 1980s; although deep within his scenario is the basic contradiction that Marxists believe will ultimately spell the demise of capitalism.[250] In fact, in his own way, this was the conclusion reached by this participant. One company had stated to him: 'We don't want our staff thinking for themselves,' which he saw as 'their fatal mistake', and interpreted as following:

> 'What those guys are doing is designing their business out of business by concentrating on fake sustainability and carrying on the old business model; and I say to them jokingly, "Well, who am I to stop you from designing the demise of your business?"' (CDL).

There are some similarities as well as differences between the responses of the above participants. Both recognise that the capitalist model is at the base of much of the unsustainability that has caused the environmental and social dilemma. The union representative, an economist, recognises this intellectually and comes to the position that sustainable development might help to construct a new meta-narrative that would help unions to reposition themselves and society to be reconstructed to be institutionally more equitable. He envisages that it might become an integral part of a new political economy 'somewhere in the middle' between unfettered capitalism and extreme socialism, and in Chapter Ten I explore what this might mean in concrete terms. The community development leader, while still having faith in the capitalist model per se, has arrived through a painful journey at the point where the

[249] This possibly clarifies the stance of others, such as environmentalists, who join the 'industry of sustainable development' to try to change companies, but without addressing the structural limits to progressive agency.

[250] The inherent contradictions of capitalism are discussed in Chapter One (Harvey, 1996); and Chapter Two.

contradictions, asymmetric power and inequity of the model have been thrust upon him. He has emerged from the midst of the 'business case' cadre – once one of their apostles; now ostracised and cynical. The two cases present an intellectual and an emotional response that reach the same conclusion: that the capitalist model as it has operated produces a one-dimensional life where government and business liaise despite their opposition; and where it is the poor, workers, indigenous people and the environment that 'pay' for the system. However, both maintain some hope, particularly in terms of empowerment of people at community level, which is discussed later.

One other 'case' from the business context unpicks the dilemma that exists for people who are part of the business scene, but who do not give uncritical support to the dominant paradigm; and it surfaces a level of nostalgia for what New Zealand was recalled to be like in the 1950s. Some people believe that the country, not so long ago, was fairer and more equitable - people were kinder to each other, whereas the 'greed' that now characterises the country has changed that. This participant, the executive director of a major industry council, has worked in industry for forty years. He saw the turn to materialism as leaving a vacuum in people's lives:

> 'at the end of the day, development is related to consumption; and I think, if we are looking for more in our lives, it can't necessarily always be more material things.' (PCNZ).

Old values and an ability to enjoy life seemed to have slipped past – the 'relationship [between] time spent consuming vis-à-vis the time enjoying' was unbalanced: 'maybe I'm getting grandfatherly, but I think we've got it wrong.' Runaway materialism meant that, for example, while recycling and reduction of packaging figures (his industry's business) may have risen impressively (if only for financial reasons), the increased level of consumption – the *scale* of the problem – negates such 'progress':

> 'globalisation is in fact expensive from a resource perspective and therefore, if we are talking about sustainable development, we really perhaps ought to be going the other way.' (PCNZ).

The fact that companies in New Zealand that have become icons for resource efficiency are still 'in the process of pursuing or producing things which are actually not required anyway,' while still getting 'full ticks for doing it better,' introduced a

critique of the 'business case' for sustainable development and the triple bottom line driver:

> 'I see triple bottom line as a shorter-term measurement assessment. I see sustainable development, if it's done properly, as almost a philosophical position. I think you could engineer ... demonstrable triple bottom line ... results whilst still not meeting the sustainable development objectives. I would look at it more as creative accounting practices in some cases ...' (PCNZ).

These companies were seen as pursuing environmental gains of waste management and resource conservation for financial reasons - 'dictated by the mighty dollar.'

The economic model that assesses the 'health' of society on its level of consumption was proffered as the real 'silence' of sustainable development – 'the refusal to accept that, within the context of what we are espousing to achieve, we've already got an objective that makes it impossible.' This seemed particularly destructive of a way of life in once-self-sufficient New Zealand, where, today, 'some children may *not* be being fed in some South Auckland schools'; yet where the general level of material expectation is high: ('I understand that we have the highest level of personal debt in the OECD'). The problem of increasing inequality was highlighted:

> 'the more capable people in the main perhaps feel less obligated to look after the less capable ... they feel they are entitled to get what they can regardless of the fact that they might not have done that in the fifties.' (PCNZ).

This disparity between incomes and life-styles was considered something new in a relatively egalitarian and homogeneous country like New Zealand:

> '... the rich are getting all the gains in a society where we're ostensibly trying to work against that ... there are people that don't produce anything but make heaps of money. That encourages a philosophy of opportunism ... and that usually comes at someone else's expense.' (PCNZ).

It was felt that government could do little to rebalance the situation, for example, through taxation, since 'there are major accounting firms running around telling everyone, if you are a successful businessman, go and set up in Australia.'[251]

[251] The theme of business moving overseas was a strong undercurrent of the research. Much big business, New Zealand- and overseas-owned, has already shifted overseas, and two major overseas-owned businesses were named as threatening to move off-shore if government introduced stronger company taxation (LGNZ; PCNZ; MED).

There was little optimism that we could move toward sustainable development within the current paradigm ('In absolute terms, I don't think we can'); although it was noted that senior industry people might be getting mileage out of 'sustainable development', at least for the short-term, while the public was left out of the debate:

> 'but if you don't take the society along with you, you don't actually get the benefits.' (PCNZ).

This echoed the view of the previous participant, that the capitalist model has in-built contradictions that may lead to its own demise, especially as it becomes less 'democratic' and erodes the basis of its own support. While dematerialisation was offering some short-lived benefits to industry, it was pointed out that:

> 'there's a difference between behavioural change and a change of values: and I think as a nation we need to value some things differently if we are really going to get over the hump.' (PCNZ).

The 'vision' was a nostalgic one for something 'more like the 1950s – maybe I'm naïve, but that is the sort of thing I would envisage'. This philosophical reflection on the changed nature of New Zealand from a successful industry manager, and the nostalgia for something special that had been lost, and which no amount of current business activity, for all its talk of 'social goals', could replace, presented something of a 'defining line' in the research. This seemed to be based on the age as much as the values of the participants: this manager was looking back to his youth in the fifties, whereas a number of the other managers interviewed were born in the 1960s or 1970s, and had entered the workforce when a different climate and different values were evolving and had become taken-for-granted. This may be one explanation of the fact that the 'social' aspects of the agenda surfaced more readily in this interview. Another could be the fact that the participant was closer to retirement, which 'emancipated' him from the constraints experienced by managers mostly in mid-career positions.

9.4 Emerging Contestation: Corporate Accounts

Amongst the corporate managers, the level of appreciation of a 'strong' conception of sustainable development and any counter-hegemonic arguments varied (see Chapter Seven): some were already inclined to be critical of the dominant growth model that underpins business; while others became more critical as they reflected upon its impacts and listened to other views in the group meetings. Most of the 'political struggle' that emerged focused on that model – its historical origins, its impacts, its limitations and evident invincibility, and the extent to which managers were trapped within it. In one group meeting, a participant clarified his thinking by looking back over the development of the industrial growth paradigm from the time of the Industrial Revolution, commenting on the rapid and accelerating rate of change and the developing concerns about impacts and population growth. He noted that this model had so absorbed business that people were only 'just ... pausing for breath for the first time ... to wonder whether we're on the right track' (SP, Manufacturing). Another participant reflected on the asymmetric power now exerted by the North to control Third World use of resources in their own struggle for development. One person highlighted the hypocrisy involved, since some of the North's asset-backing lay in 'Third World governance, where they've used their money to fund American arms manufacturers to buy the latest fighters' (EM, Primary Production); and pointed out that the discussion was touching on 'a whole geo-political framework' that he believed made the concept of environmental sustainability untenable, and which he evidently had not expected the research to critique. Another reflected on the scale of the problem and whether sustainable development was an oxymoron:

> '... I remain pessimistic ... you think about the overall resource-use equation and the paradigm with the current economic growth approach to life, and I just don't see how we can continue to grow economies and balance the resource equation.' (DCS, Gas Utility).

He, too, was exercised about the North-South divide, and what would happen if the South were successful in attaining the economic levels of the North ('... we just threw that equation right out of the window!'). Although he wanted to believe we could 'marry the two' – sustainability and development – ('Is it possible to assume

that we can achieve sustainability whilst developing?') - he concluded the equation simply did not work, and that 'we're still on a collision course ... if we maintain that economic paradigm ... you could question whether the sustainable development concept and way of thinking is going to save us from that ...' (DCS, Gas Utility).

Others also pointed out that the nature of the economic model dictated that the 'equation' of growth and sustainability did not work. One person, with a 'reasonably good feel for what global economics is actually all about' commented that the commercial model spun off from that – based on reified categories such as 'return on capital' and 'quarterly reporting' – meant that businesses 'are totally focused around that [growth] objective' (SP, Manufacturing). This model presented business with 'immediate imperatives' that made it hard to take a longer-term perspective that was more in keeping with sustainability:

> 'Did you make money for the five years you were in operation or did you not? Did that show up in each quarterly report? What was the stock market saying about your price?' (SP, Manufacturing).

His sympathetic comment to another member of the group who talked of the competitive risk for his company of using only Forestry Stewardship Council certificated timber for their goods was that 'the business model won't let you contract to that by necessarily *taking a high set of principles* – because you'll end up with only 20% of the customer base that you currently have,' (SP, Manufacturing, emphasis added). He believed that business needed a financial structure that allowed for some investments to be made 'that would not get through the normal hurdles [such as] higher rates of return, discounting, cash flows. It's very hard to have projects that might have a five or ten year lead time before they really start generating returns ... you need a Board that can look past that ... even though the Accountant's analysis doesn't always look that flash,' (SP, Manufacturing).

Some came to the conclusion that it was not possible to work towards sustainable development within the paradigm, despite the claims made by the 'business case':

> 'I think business deep down knows what has to happen, but they're stuck ... they're stuck with the model ... with saying they can only do so much: "We understand the needs, but we have to keep making money, we have to keep growing."' (EC, Retailing).

Several echoed these views ('You're primarily being motivated for financial performance at the expense of human beings and ... the environment,' EA, Manufacturing). Companies were represented as saying:

> 'We're not prepared to compromise one cent of profit. We like sustainable development, but we're not prepared to budge on performance.' (EA, Manufacturing).

There was some agreement that sustainable development was stymied by 'return on investment' and 'what the shareholders want'; although companies would work on 'increased efficiency and reliability', but without any designs to balance growth. The environmental manager of a fishing company reliant on export for 90% of its trade recognised the invincibility of the dominant paradigm and that his company was trapped within it. He did not perceive that their membership of the Business Council and allegiance to the 'business case' would make them less vulnerable:

> 'We're vulnerable in terms of world economics ... if the New Zealand dollar was to dramatically increase, we would be in big trouble.' (EM, Primary Production).

The general disregard for environmental externalities was noted, and some institutional issues began to surface as people raised the problems they saw associated with the economic growth model and the capitalist paradigm; although they generally found these issues difficult to confront and to discuss, even when they recognised and had experienced their effects. It also has to be borne in mind that the managers tended to be politically conservative; and that discussion of alternative models was possibly feared to be leading in the direction of totalitarian solutions.

Issues of equity and social justice began to be raised as part of the problem of the dominant paradigm that sustainable development needed to address – 'there's a social justice aspect to it,' (EA, Manufacturing) – although, as noted (Chapter Seven), this sometimes took some prompting from myself or other group members. One participant was convinced that sustainable development was 'a much more social construct really than an environmental construct':

> 'I think sustainability is now much more about recognising the impact it has ... on the culture of people, their way of life, how they live ...' (SHEA, Chemicals).

This meant 'making sure [there was] some form of equity ... it's about giving and receiving and making sure there's some fairness,' (SHEA, Chemicals). Part of the equation was recognised as an issue of redistribution – 'reduction in the quality of life [*sic* 'standard of living'] for some people', which he recognised society had great difficulty accepting. One person produced figures he had heard quoted at a conference on what it would 'cost' to get poor nations above the basic poverty level, having learned that it would not be difficult to relieve at least the worst levels: 'it would be ...1% ... of the wealth of Western nations ... but we're in a world where drivers don't exist, or any consensus ... on that,' (DCS, Gas Utility). This insight had brought the realisation that such release from poverty would also solve other problems, such as over-population, 'but in a world where there is deep divide between East and West, and the George Bushes of the world are hell-bent on keeping that divide' he was not optimistic that this could be achieved. One group member said he had struggled with the equity part of the equation (which did not easily fit into his own 'scientific' paradigm), but had reached the conclusion that, although it was not an easy issue to address, 'if that [equity] is not somewhere in the equation, it tends to be very quickly just the rich states accumulating more, the poor getting a hard deal ... one group robbing resources, the other suffering.' This was considered unsustainable, not only for the intrinsic aspects of social justice, but because it would lead to 'political instability ... wars and those sorts of things as we shake the foundation of what we thought was sustainable,' (SP, Manufacturing).

The examination of the growth model naturally re-focused some people's thinking about the 'business case', which, as was shown in Chapter Seven, was generally regarded with some enthusiasm as a 'can do' alternative. Several participants could assess quite clinically the reasons why businesses were not only embracing the model, but doing so quite publicly and audibly:

> '... probably in the majority of cases, people are coming to this because there are good business reasons in terms of maintaining their markets or fending off government ... we shouldn't be too dewy-eyed about this ... you can pretty quickly grasp what the drivers for them are, and they're initially business drivers.' (DCS, Gas Utility).

Even where companies were promoting the business case, it was felt that they still had both feet firmly in the traditional business model – only some camouflage had

been adopted in terms of eco-efficiency measures. A member of one such company pointed out that the company still operated on the old commitment to 'profits, straight profits ... they're too committed to the world of profitability ... working to invent new wants and needs,' (EC, Retailing); while the CEO who had promoted the business case in that company was seen as 'stuck ... he's just lost the passion.' This, of course, may be a very acute reflection, not on the sincerity or beliefs of the CEO, but the real difficulty of turning a company to sustainable development[252] when all the pressures of the market and of meeting shareholder demands run counter to the vision. The extreme difficulty of breaking free of the thinking of the old business model – and the fact that the 'business case' is just another form of that model - perhaps came through most vividly in this employee's own struggle to see how the company could genuinely become more sustainable when he envisioned having one of its retail stores in every town in New Zealand as a means of being more sustainable and equitable. There was no anomaly perceived in this: he had a genuine belief that the company delivered bargains that were within everyone's reach and, in this sense alone, provided a social service. However, this participant had also experienced some self-doubt because of his inability to influence what were essentially structural issues. This provided an example of the panopticisms that may be set in place at the level of the individual to take responsibility for structures beyond his control:

> 'I am totally questioning myself that I don't have the right people skills or the right management skills and therefore haven't got the message across properly.' (EC, Retailing).

At the same time, he was not the only employee of the company to experience disillusionment, and it emerged that one highly critical manager that I had already interviewed and another that I had hoped to interview were leaving the firm:

> 'I think the reality is that [the company] probably realised they don't need [critical members of staff]. The model that we've got hasn't got room for the likes of X and Y, and therefore we'll just simply employ people who fit the model; and one of the ways they're doing this is [to] promote from within.' (EC, Retailing).

[252] Even at chief executive level, and where the person has a controlling stake in the company, it is difficult to oppose the structural limits that dictate what business can and cannot do: the opportunity for progressive agency is limited; which counters some of the literature that hinges the turn to sustainable development on chief executive agency.

A theme that emerged was that of 'agency':[253] what level of power such managers have to influence the ways in which the company does or does not move towards sustainability in the face of company and institutional hegemony that militate against it. As they became more aware and more critical, I was able to pose questions about how managers cope with any mismatch between their own ideals and values and the practices of the company. This was an issue that had started to surface in the second group meeting, where participants considered the implications of the 'weak-strong' continuum and attempted to place their companies and themselves on that continuum. This discussion led to a consideration in the third workshop of the issue of agency. It partly arose from the comment of one participant (Chapter Eight) that he was trying to keep sustainable development alive in his reconfigured workplace 'by stealth', a point that resonated with others. Raising such issues as part of the research process fitted the epistemological framework of the research and the research matrix, and the emancipatory research goal of raising consciousness and increasing empowerment. However, in reality, it is a delicate business to encourage people to confront whether they have agency in their workplace operations. This was especially so with a research audience of this kind, where, by and large, people were in the positions they occupied because they were concerned to help companies to become at least more environmentally responsible: they were sincere in this goal and worked hard for it. The research had encouraged them to reflect on why that is such a hard task, and why the further shift to sustainable development would be even more challenging. The feeling of failure expressed above underlines the sensitive nature of the area. On the other hand, that participant may not have had other opportunities to express such feelings, or to reflect upon them, which he did willingly and without probing. The reality was that he had 'outgrown' the job; and he subsequently left the company.

One person advocated a process of 'infiltration' into the company's thinking as a form of 'agency':

> 'if this is a sales-focused company, I am one of the greatest salesmen of the organisation ... because it is me taking the sustainable development concept and how I sell it to my people ... you put yourself in their shoes and think what they are thinking ...' (NEM, Beverages).

[253] And see Willmott, 1994b.

He explained that this 'subtlety' was vital: if he had been dogmatic, 'I'd be out the door straight away ... *they will break you and chew you up,'* which perhaps revealed more about the level of agency and systemic change that is really permitted in powerful organisations. However, others in the group found it difficult to admit such a level of compromise: '... there must come a point in time that we say, I don't accept your integrity – I'm going,' (TM, Manufacturing); but this point was not conceded: 'You don't have to be a sell-out, that's the point; you don't have to be a sell-out,' (NEM, Beverages). However, it appeared to be something of a moot point as to whether managers did have to compromise and 'sell out', or whether they could afford to reject the 'integrity' of the company. One older and very senior manager in the group had no such compunction: his approach was entirely pragmatic. He pointed out that business life, if not the whole of life, was a matter of compromise and fitting yourself to the dominant circumstances:

> 'to succeed in life you have to behave in certain environments according to the circumstances ... you've got to be flexible to recognise that, if you're dealing with one environment, you've got a totally different toolkit from somewhere else; and if that means bastardising yourself a wee bit, well, so be it ... you have to learn to ride it.' (DSM, Water Utility).

He stressed that 'you have to be pretty nimble to survive in most corporate environments'; otherwise, as the earlier speaker had observed, '*you're dead in the water.*' This, too, was contested: 'But as an individual, you should have one set of values and one vision,' (EA, Retailing). This level of contestation over what constituted ethical behaviour and agency formed something of a turning point in the research process, and while no 'answers' emerged, it illustrated the emancipatory impact of the research process.

What also emerged, not only from the workshop but the overall process of the research, was that managers and even CEOs, despite their 'heroic' roles in the broader community, have relatively little power over the actual situations in which they work and little enough scope for agency. This is not to say that people should not think about their relative levels of progressive agency: it may make it even more important that they do this. There was a tendency to believe that one of the keys was to have powerful and effective leadership – a chief executive who championed sustainable development. However, the fact is that, over a period of three years, from

the core group of sixteen companies, slumps in shares or mergers and takeovers meant that five CEOs lost their positions (two from the same company that was bought and sold twice during that time); and three environmental or SHE managers lost their positions or had them modified. These changes indicate that CEO leadership in the area is not something that can be relied upon, even where it exists. One thing that makes the jobs of these managers especially difficult in terms of the extended time-frames required for sustainable development is that they work in an ever-changing arena where no-one's job is secure any more: they are attempting to bring some sustainability to what is, effectively, a moving target. The research had opened up a degree of reflexivity in these areas, as participants themselves noted, suggesting that it was membership of the core group and the impact of the research on their thinking that had led them to some of the ideas that they were now enunciating. Consequently, when asked again, later in the research, what had influenced their conceptions of sustainable development, several participants said it had been attendance at the group meetings, the opinions of others in the group, or myself as researcher. It was interesting to note that views that had been expressed (but not necessarily agreed with) at the earlier workshops were in some cases remembered, reflected on and referred to again. Ultimately, it appeared that the 'consciousness of necessity' that had begun to develop – for justice and equity, or for greater agency or democracy – was emancipating a level of 'freedom'.

This tied in with another interesting theme that emerged in the research, and a tricky one considering the nature of business as it has just been described, which focused on the kind of 'visions' that people held for the future of business. These tended not to be very concrete: people held general views that business should be more eco-efficient and things should be fairer, more equitable and just. Those who tried to envision an alternative to the dominant paradigm found this difficult in the face of a construct so powerful and seemingly intractable that they could not envision anything beyond its boundaries. It seemed that they sensed that they were gripped within an institutional, structural model that made the task of leading the company shift to sustainable development problematic; while any contestation expressed in the interviews was still emergent and exploratory. Two participants proposed something close to a 'steady state' model of business economics that would allow companies to be more creative in their approaches; but no-one had a significantly alternative model

to offer. One had in mind a framework that would be 'fairer' and where externalities would be 'costed' and business and life would be 'fairer, happier and healthier'. His model for business was based on the principle of knowing 'how much is enough', which is not common in companies:

> 'When you think about the whole business model in terms of sustainable development ... and business growth, what's the ultimate for the company? Is it total world domination like Bill Gates? [Is] that what every company should be striving for?' (EA, Manufacturing).

He proposed a form of 'steady state' economics for a company whereby it was consistently making 'x' billion dollars profit and might then ask, 'What do we do? Do we continue to grow ... or do we actually *put something back*?' (emphasis added). Another person, asked if he could envision an alternative model, proposed a similar one where:

> 'if you were in a relatively stable industry, and everything was in reasonable equilibrium, it's quite possible that those businesses will be sort of ticking away with an appropriate return on capital, or appropriate return to shareholders, but not being looked on as a 'dud' because of that. They're just fulfilling their role in a sustainably developed society ... the whole merger/acquisition pressure may taper off a bit.' (SP, Manufacturing).

Both models were based upon an assumption of business-as-usual, with none of the room for the 'inefficiencies' that are the 'glue' of social cohesion that the community development leader believed to be important. Also, it was, perhaps, easier for the second speaker to envision such an approach, working as he does for a co-operatively-owned company. The earlier speaker had experienced his full-time position reduced to one day's 'consultancy' per week whereby he is retained to 'maintain' the competitive advantage that his programmes have achieved for the company: the company appears to feel little compunction to 'put something back'.

There was some agreement that a 'vision' was needed for New Zealand, although alternative visions tended to be vague, generally suggesting business and a way of life that were in some ways more benign. However, the union representative and the community development leader both had a clearer vision of a co-operative and community-based model. The community development leader envisaged that there would be 'tremendous local ownership':

> 'Social Enterprise Trading – local enterprises, embedded in their communities – it could be the corporation of the future. Local initiatives for local benefit.' (CDL).

The economist from the CTU saw that there would be far more co-operatives and other democratic changes, in keeping with the union movement's demand for greater worker participation in democratic decision-making in the workplace:

> 'I think there will be more co-operatives, I think there'd be broader representation on boards ... there'd be greater [broader, more comprehensive] industry focus.' (CTU).

One of the key issues for New Zealand is that of company size, where most firms have, on average, 4.04 employees. That being the case, it perhaps strengthens these arguments that the future lies in much more community ownership of production and consumption and more co-operatives, since, in one sense, the majority of New Zealand business already operates within close community parameters, although not necessarily in 'co-operatively-owned' mode. The sticking point at present is that the relatively few large companies (by New Zealand standards) control a disproportionately large part of the economy, and more than 50% of those are overseas-owned. However, as the research discourse developed, a framework started to become thinkable, whereby, through the model of co-operatives and more community-driven business initiatives, a new model might emerge - one where the community took much greater responsibility for the sustainability, not only of its business and economic base, but of the ecological base that supports this. Structurally, the devolution of responsibility for environmental legislation to the local level in New Zealand, although not without its problems, also suggests a further form of local sufficiency and empowerment in decision-making: a building block towards local sustainable development.

Knight's work with communities had engendered community support for and ownership of sustainability, not through rhetoric and 'definitions' ('They didn't need to have a definition of sustainable development', Knight, personal communication, 2002), but by asking deceptively simple questions about how people ended up getting to the point they were at; what it was about their landscape or city that they valued or aspired to; and what was a 'symbol' of that. He and his colleagues had

tapped into the 'mass of sense lying in a dormant state' that, once awakened, brought about a vision and action plan with a speed uncommon for government agencies. For example, this led the community in the central North Island to agree that Lake Taupo represented such a taonga (treasure) and symbol for them. It was then possible to encourage them to reflect on what would return the lake to its former pristine state which they yearned for: what that would mean for local residents, for farmers, for businesses, for visitors and so on, until a community plan for sustainable Taupo was envisioned.[254] Knight suggests that this model could be transposed to the national level, where '... we need a vision. We need to say: "This is what New Zealand should be like."' It represents an interesting model for envisioning a different political economy in New Zealand, based on democratic inclusivity – and possibly one not very far removed from the nostalgia of the industry council executive, whose own vision was for something like the New Zealand community of the 1950s.

9.5 Concluding Comments

The level of counter-hegemonic contestation that arose in the course of the research was not high, but it was significant. It introduced some strong conceptions of sustainable development that were in contestation with the business model of eco-efficiency. Several participants had more radical views to begin with – about politics, business activity and society; and this had its own impact on group awareness. Some from the broader social context were clearly reacting from personal experience; or their politics and ideology had directed them into work situations – such as a trade union organisation – that represented strong positions on equity and social justice. Other participants became aware of different aspects of taken-for-granted views as a result of exposure to a situation where a new conceptual space was opened up which they could challenge and explore in safety. Views began to be expressed that contested the strongly advocated business case. At the same time, it would not be true to say that they replaced it: rather, it seemed that some participants were 'exploring' different positions, tasting the edge of discomfort that this produced.

[254] While it is encouraging that the Ministry for Economic Development has picked up this model, time will tell what impact this has upon 'local ownership' of the plan, and whether central government can provide the structures that support local sustainable development without diminishing democratic participation.

Some appeared to be enunciating views and opinions they held which had been kept in abeyance. A few were nostalgic for gentler times; and at least one was bent on radical change that would bring greater fairness and justice.

Counter-hegemonic views are also being voiced at a more formal level, and documented, as in the Report produced by the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. While this Report has been critiqued here as wavering from its stated radical position, it represents a public stake in the ground for a different kind of discourse, more inclusive, and not dominated by the 'business case' for sustainable development, like the one it is based upon (PRISM/Knight, 2000). The problematisation of sustainable development undertaken in my thesis convinces me that this is the key to any significant shift towards sustainable development. In a limited way, the corporate interview provided the conceptual space for new views to be heard and considered: it presented an opportunity for dialectical discourse that was new to participants. The level of conceptual change that took place, and the sites of 'contestation' and 'struggle' that emerged indicate to me that the lost opportunity for more public discourse that the Sustainable Development Strategy represented is something that the government needs to retrieve. Sustainable development, at its heart, is about 'The Rights of Man'. The current power of the business lobby over its conceptualisation indicates that the government should 'quietly harness' or emancipate the 'mass of sense' that the New Zealand public represents, which brought it to power and kept it there after the neo-liberal experiment.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

> ... an ecologically inept institutional order of capitalism plus the administrative state is vulnerable to change in the direction of a more open and democratically discursive alternative ... One of the more attractive features of such experiments is that they are open-ended and that institutional change is itself on the agenda.
>
> John Dryzek, *'Ecology and Discursive Democracy: Beyond Liberal Capitalism and the Administrative State'*, 1994.[255]

10.1 Introduction

Perhaps the hardest part of what has been a challenging research engagement is to review the process of the inquiry, including its lacunae and opportunities missed, and to gauge what have been the outcomes and 'benefits' of the research. A challenge for myself as researcher lay not only in the contested concept of sustainable development that was the focus of the inquiry, but also in the nature of the research 'audiences' vis-à-vis the critical and radical worldview of the research: I could assume as a starting position that corporate managers did not, as general practice, reflect on the radical dimensions of sustainable development. A further challenge lay within the research process itself, whereby I determined early on that I would embark on a re-theorisation of the research which would not only challenge me personally in terms of new literatures and concepts to craft into my kit of skills; but would alter the research process and the nature of the goals, some of which would emerge only in the course of the research.

In this chapter, I review what I set out to achieve through the inquiry and try to assess the extent to which the goals were reached. An auto-critique is provided of the effects the re-theorisation of the research had on the process, the evidence gained, and my own development as researcher. The research questions are re-examined in the light of the narrative I have constructed, relating the empirical findings back to the questions at the beginning of the thesis as well as the ones that emerged in

[255] In M. O'Connor (Ed.) (1994).

process. My aim here is not to re-tread ground covered in Chapters Seven to Nine, but to undertake a broader review of the dissertation, to reflect on the extent to which I achieved my goals and to consider the implications for my future research programme. I attempt to examine the extent to which the research met its emancipatory goals, and what my constructed role as researcher contributed to that process. From the account so far, a number of issues emerge for discussion, as well as ideas for future research which mean that this is by no means the closing chapter of my narrative. The dialectical approach that I have attempted to bring to the research means that the 'story' is still emerging: it is in the process of construction through a discourse that is as yet incomplete.

The inquiry arose from some ambitious speculations. One was to consider whether the contested concept of sustainable development potentially held within it a new meta-narrative of society that would challenge the taken-for-granted hegemonies of the capitalist economy as it has been constructed in the North. Emancipatory theories of 'eco-socialism' (O'Connor, 1998) offered attractive goals in the light of the ecological and social problematic that characterised the turn of the century. Perhaps a new millennium contributed to the desire for a vision or a meta-theory of society that explored possible worlds through an inclusive process of discursivity. First, however, came the task of critiquing reified or naturalised constructs of society on the understanding that social constructs are subject to change: they have been constructed and can be deconstructed (Harvey, 1996), the means being through a dialectical process of discourse. The 'big (normative) picture', to which the research could only contribute some brush strokes, was to theorise through a dialectical approach what would be meant by sustainable business in a sustainable New Zealand. The part of the picture that I have provided here is small, but not inconsiderable: it provides critical insights into conceptions of sustainable development held by powerful groups and coalitions. It demonstrates not only a level of appropriation of the concept, but insights into the mechanics of appropriation. In keeping with the dialectical principle that social constructs are subject to change, it reveals that the process of appropriation is not complete or without contestation; and that the praxis built into the research may be able to make a small claim to having 'made a difference'.

10.2 The Epistemological Framework: Finding the 'fit'

The goal of my research inquiry was to tell a contextually grounded story about business and sustainable development in New Zealand and to make my own contribution to the literature. The normative agenda of the research was closely associated with my own positionality as researcher. I have attempted to explain my own agenda in Chapter One, and to leave space in the theorisation for the positionality of the researched also to emerge. In summary, my original focus had been upon *how* companies were making the transition to sustainable development: I was keen to understand the drivers and the means of doing business in more sustainable ways; and what might encourage greater commitment to this goal on the part of major corporations that might, in some ways, be deemed the 'models' for business. On reflection, I realised that the 'goal' here would have been to contribute to the 'green business' literature arising from organisational theory. My concerns about this 'green management' literature, and particularly its lack of fit with my ontological perspective on sustainable development, prompted the re-theorisation of the research inquiry in Critical Theory. This meant engaging in a different theoretical conversation – one with which I was only superficially familiar – and it changed the nature of my research contribution in significant ways. It also meant a level of reflexivity between the theory and the empirical research had commenced at an early stage in the process; and its impacts were profound at both theoretical and practical levels.

The decision to re-orientate the research arose from the fundamental concern that 'management' was part of the 'problem' of sustainable development in terms of both causality and the predominating discourse. This concern was central to the alleged appropriation of the concept by business that is reflected in the international literature. The 'gap' or 'problem' I originally identified in the organisational theory literature was its historical failure to address issues of sustainable development. A further 'problem' was the failure of the 'greening of business' literature emerging from organisational theory in the 1990s to critique structural causes of unsustainable development and unsustainable business: the focus was upon 'management' and 'solutions', not causality. Indeed, the original problematisation for my research study had reflected this. The focus had been on functionalist issues that would change

operational management, but not necessarily address the underlying structural origins of the problems. The 'gap' in the green literature was not only one of *inattention,* or incomplete problematisation, but the lack of 'critical' perspective. My concern was the extent to which researchers like myself might be shoring up corporate appropriation of sustainable development by providing a literature about management 'tools', risk avoidance and 'competitive advantage' and construing this as sustainable development (Chapters Four and Five). Such research perpetuates an instrumental management paradigm of modernism based on the assumption that business can and should 'solve' the environmental problem. It addresses the 'green means' of doing business, but generally represses ethical, social and radical issues of sustainable development or its systemic basis in the capitalist means of production and consumption.[256] My revised goal was to make a contribution that would problematise the green business literature and the 'management' of sustainable development.

As Chapter Four has discussed, the lack of critical perspective was a complication identified in the canon of management literature. Critical perspectives had been applied to 'traditional' organisational and operational aspects of management; but the 'gap' remained that issues of sustainable development were not part of this critical examination. However, the critical theorisation of business and sustainable development that was emerging in the late 1990s, as I commenced my own research, endorsed my decision to re-theorise the research inquiry. This necessitated a detachment from the managerial research paradigm that largely characterises the business research effort; and a re-attachment to the neo-Marxian and generally 'critical' perspectives employed in my earlier research in education. Essentially, I sought a theorisation that would make it possible to recognise and critique a historically situated coalition of business, government, professional and intellectual élites that had become dominant and powerful, but whose legitimacy was fundamentally challenged by the radical agenda of sustainable development. My 'macro-problem' had become how to theorise an environmentally sound society. This called for the attempt to envisage a 'political economy of ecology' (O'Connor,

[256] That is not to say that the 'green' literature is not based in 'ethics' (for example, see Cannon, 1994); and much attention is afforded to 'social issues' such as stakeholder and community engagement.

1998; and see Chapter Two); and to conceive of a meta-narrative of the good life where sustainable development had the radical power to bring ecological and social justice to an 'ir-rational' world. While the vision was 'utopian', the 'scepticism' of the CT and Foucauldian approach would promote both 'critical distance' *and* emancipatory conceptions. This perspective provided the tools to observe aspects of domination, asymmetric power and repression as these emerged in the discourses opened up by the research, and their opposition to the agenda of equity, justice and empowerment.

The present research inquiry could examine only part of that broader canvas; but I determined that it was nevertheless a complex discourse that was to be undertaken, and that the re-theorisation was sufficiently multidimensional, dialectical and robust to free the discourse from some of its existing restraints, while providing a genuine research challenge. It meant taking two steps back from the project: firstly, to re-think the research in terms of Critical Theory and 'critical' theory, drawing on a broader literature taken from the social sciences and providing a critique of the green business literature. Secondly, it changed the 'complication' or 'gap' for the research and the resolution to be developed in the story of my field work. My 'problem' had shifted from a functional to a more conceptual one: how the concept of sustainable development was conceived; how power and knowledge determine what constructions are arrived at; how asymmetrical control is exercised over the power of definition; and issues of emancipation. Specifically, it was to provide a critique of a meta-narrative already being framed to 'produce' political sustainability; to attend to what was excluded from this narrative in terms of ecological and social justice; and to reveal what forms of 'domination' informed the debate.

Locating my research within Critical Theory was not without its own complications. I wished to avoid a 'totalising' stand (Chapter Two); which, to some extent, I effected by incorporating concepts from Foucault, and his position that 'left values' do not necessarily signify a totalising or communist stance. This was something about which I needed to be epistemologically and theoretically clear before embarking on research with managers in capitalist corporations. The complication in terms of CT/Foucauldian perspectives emanated in part from the research focus on nature/sustainable development, 'nature' representing one of the lacunae of these

theories. While it is possible to make a case for nature in Marxian and Critical Theory, as I do in Chapter Two, where the epistemological framework is expanded, to make a case for nature in Foucauldian theory is harder ('My back is turned to it', Chapter Two). However, my imperative was not to make a 'case for nature' in order to employ these theories: rather, they were to assist me with tools to examine taken-for-granted structures and beliefs which have themselves contributed to the ecological and social crises which business now claims to be able to resolve. They were fundamental to framing the problematisation of both the concept and business' engagement with it and helped to unearth the purposes as well as some contestation of this engagement. The re-theorisation opened up understanding of why things are the way they are; and posed questions about how change might or might not take place. It provided a means of critiquing the increasing power of the management paradigm that was occluding more fundamental issues of sustainable development with its 'common-sense' barrier to deliberative contestation.[257] Importantly, it provided the possibility of engaging counter-hegemonic views that signalled that the appropriation of sustainable development was not complete, and that it might be emerging as a 'site of political struggle'. My re-theorised project represented a new discourse on business and sustainable development in New Zealand, and a different macro-story for my long-term research programme. The new literatures drawn from provided a basis for synthesised inter-textual coherence, blending Critical/Foucauldian Theory perspectives with the social science literature to critique the organisational literature of green business. I have put together work not previously considered related in order to pursue investigative concerns that surface in the major theoretical conversations drawn upon; and construe some commonality between them: for example, the 'gap' around sustainable development is one area for resolution. There were also areas of non-coherence in the inter-textual fields being synthesized which provided the basis of the research 'story'.[258] The selected literatures are problematised as being 'incomplete'; and the narrative constructed here represents an attempt to fill part of the gap left around sustainable development

[257] It was borne in mind that Sayer (1984) suggests that the concepts from Critical Theory may 'affront' the 'common-sense' of other parties (Chapter Six).

[258] Specifically, these centred around the non-coherence between traditional organisation theory and 'green' business theory; between traditional organisational theory and CT/Foucauldian Theory; and between 'green' business theory and CT/Foucauldian Theory.

understood as a radical concept representing structural and institutional issues to be resolved. The 'resolution' I can provide at the end of this inquiry fulfils those aims only in part, but indicates areas of ongoing research.

My next task is to explain the extent to which the selected literature and the theorisation drawn from that 'worked' for the research and how my radical conception of sustainable development contributed to the evidence. The most important advantage was the degree to which the theory offered a more open, dialogical relationship between myself and the participants. The level of reflexivity that quickly emerged was one indication of this. Associated with this was the level of 'risk-taking' in terms of openness about personal beliefs and the operations of business. Participants found themselves reflecting on very different aspects of the problem from the ones I believe they had anticipated: on issues of power, personal responsibility and agency; on social and ethical issues as well as constructs of eco-efficiency. Not only did they reflect upon 'power' as it operates within corporations, but they had the opportunity over the course of a year to witness how that power could dominate or dispatch plans for sustainable development that members of the group were involved in; and that even (or especially) CEOs were vulnerable to the power of the market as companies changed hands. The dialectical discourse meant that they could express opinions or dissonances and these would be incorporated into the discursive process: it was not necessary to play 'winners' and 'losers' in the interactions, although it was evident from some of the earliest interactions that this was often part of normal or expected demeanour in business groups. To some extent, the participants' considered and evolving opinions came to represent the views of 'rational' individuals versus an 'ir-rational' society (Chapter Two) as they began to distance themselves from and critique some things that had been taken-for-granted. They started to think about contingencies of sustainable development – not how to conserve energy, reduce waste or prevent pollution – but those contingencies that had resulted in the construct of sustainable development. At the same time, I would not wish to advance too many claims for what happened for participants in the research; and, clearly, for some, it was impossible to tell whether any constitutive change had occurred.

Overall, I believe that the evidence that emerged validated the re-theorisation of the research. I still experience some conflict in that a number of emerging issues could not be examined as thoroughly as I might have liked; and there were opportunities missed which will have to form the focus of future inquiries. Against this, I believe the theorisation itself was the means of unearthing more 'evidence' than I had anticipated; and that the dialectical process begun can continue. The re-theorisation of the research also gave rise to the 'weak-strong' heuristic used as part of the research process and to examine the evidence, and I comment on the contribution this made to the research process in section 10.3.

One other advantage of the theorisation that emerged was dealing with the 'problem' of the generally 'eco-modernist' approaches that front groups, corporates and coalition groups clearly favour. The 'problem' lay in the need to acknowledge that benefits may reside in this construction of sustainable development, and, in a Foucauldian sense, to refrain from 'judgement' while maintaining a Pyrrhonian scepticism. It was not part of my research to 'villainise' these methods or the people who employ them. Knight (2000, and see Chapter Nine) alludes to this conflict, and the need to be able to apportion due credit to initiatives that have value, even though they do not represent a radical understanding of sustainable development or fundamental change to the causes of unsustainability. It is necessary to keep in perspective any benefits the model offers, even though the techniques need to be incorporated into a more fundamental focus on structural change; and it has to be recalled that the model of ecological modernisation itself may be constitutive of more than it appears to represent. It may, in the end, act as a bridge to a fuller problematisation of sustainable development, depending on how its ideological purposes are framed.

10.3 Reflecting on the Research Process

As noted, the re-theorisation of the research had its impacts on the goals and the process employed for working towards these goals. It changed the nature of the 'grand tour' questions for the empirical research, as well as the questions employed in the interview schedule and those that emerged in the course of the interviews. The

focus on exploring 'conceptions' of sustainable development and the ways in which these were 'constructed' dictated a more complex research engagement with participants, one that would be longer-term for the core group; and it underlined the problematic role of the 'researcher' as 'educator'. I wished to avoid a pedantic role as 'traditional intellectual' that might imply indoctrination. The preferred role of 'organic intellectual' offered a more inclusive approach to the discourse, whereby we were all 'learners' on a journey made together. Nevertheless, there was an expectation on the part of some participants that, in some way, I 'knew the answers' to the questions I asked; and part of the research process early on was to develop a more exploratory, dialogic process within which we all accepted that there were no functionalist 'right' answers, although there were some core themes. This was sometimes problematic – I was challenged by one participant at the first group meeting for not 'telling' them what I thought; but, ultimately, I believe that perseverance with the discursive approach 'opened out' group thinking, or expanded the conceptual area within which people were prepared to explore new thinking. Also, my sharing of my own views became part of the general process that developed in the group once we had transcended the point where 'inducting' my views might have become part of the group norms.

The multi-method, multi-source strategies selected made possible a level of triangulation that resulted in corroboration of key evidence. I was able to view topics from different 'windows' and assess where convergence lay between data collected by different means; and where non-convergence emerged, as it did in the counter-hegemonic views unearthed. The corporate interview, as my major evidentiary strategy, was vital to the evidence that was gathered. It made it possible to hold a discursive dialogue, one where I also learned from participants. It was a strategy that underlined that these were not 'bad' or 'mistaken' people, labouring under 'false consciousness', or uncaring about the impacts of business on nature and people. The interviews did reveal, however, the limitations imposed upon them, in terms of the content of their education and the institutional agendas of business, as well as the broader institutions and instruments that dictate what business shall be. Even those most ideologically opposed to my own views had things to teach me, so that I took something from the interview situations to reflect on: they informed my better understanding of business, the structures within which it operates, the imperatives

that drive it and the coalitions that protect it. In addition, the inclusion of participants from the broader social context proved an advantage to the overall research process in terms of contextualising and corroborating corporate views, and assessing how corporates and sustainable development organisations established for business are perceived by other observers.

Against this, the documentary artefacts, which provided some of my evidence, could not reflect process in the same way as the corporate interviews; nor is it possible to know what level of dialogic process marked the development of the documents examined. The result is that the documentary evidence is 'static' compared with the discursivity of the corporate interviews; although, again, it is important for the level of corroboration of evidence that is provided in the research story. One of the insights gained from the research process was the value of the corporate interview as an evidentiary strategy; and I would, in future, when employing documentary evidence, attempt to engage key figures involved in its preparation or promulgation in a discourse about the process that went into determining the content of that evidence; and how, if at all, it is followed up in order to inform future policy-making.

The 'weak-strong' heuristic proved to be valuable. Based on the comprehensive matrix drawn from the theory (Appendix 2), it provided a 'touchstone' for keeping the empirical research and my role within that 'located' within the theory. Additionally – and I had not anticipated this at the start – it was an heuristic I discovered I could introduce in the corporate interviews. Participants, in a tentative way, started to 'map' their own and others' responses in terms of 'strong' and 'weak' sustainable development which resulted in the conclusion that companies not only 'focused' on weak sustainable development, but had difficulty in achieving even those indicators (Chapter Seven). It provided one example of reflexivity beginning to emerge in the research – a degree of 'critical distance' being exercised between the 'ideals' of participants that were developing in the group meetings, and the 'reality' of corporate functioning. In addition, the heuristic provided a means for participants to gauge their own conceptions of sustainable development, and, again, cast a light on the gap between some developing conceptions and the 'action' permitted in the workplace. For the group to examine the issue of 'corporate appropriation' of the agenda, for example, indicated that the heuristic and the theorisation that

underpinned it had opened a space for emancipation, taking the research process some way from eco-efficiency strategies; while the discursive views reflected the more open and dialogic exchanges that came to characterise the corporate interviews.

Amongst the themes that emerged during the research process was the extent to which systemic conditions may prevent managers from perceiving the radical and social issues of sustainable development. Managers themselves commented a number of times on the gap in their education that this represented, and the need for more education for sustainable development to be provided at both formal and informal levels. Another observation from both managers and CEOs was that it was unusual, in their experience, for a researcher like myself to actually 'get involved' with them: the level of engagement was described as 'an exception rather than the rule'. This indicated that the praxis built into the research was making a difference. Managers are also institutionally constrained, something that I already recognised, but which became clearer as the research proceeded. Corporations themselves adhere to institutional norms with which managers are expected to comply. In addition, as the managers emphasized, the hegemonic power of the traditional economic paradigm, the stock-market and shareholders impacts on what they may or may not do – not least by underlining to them that they are, at all times, expendable. Another theme that emerged was that, despite some indications to the contrary, people hold ethical ideals that encourage them to critique the status quo once the space to do this is opened up; and the degree of counter-hegemonic reaction that emerged was an indication of this. I attribute the emergent themes that arose during the research process to the re-theorisation of the research, and the dialectical process that I attempted to employ at all times, so that the interview process remained dynamic.

On a personal level, an emergent 'theme' was my own improved understanding of mainstream business ideology and how it operates. As I became a participant in inter-subjective exchanges, I gained a greater feeling and sympathy for the extent to which people are 'trapped' in this paradigm, a stronger interest in how progressive agency might be encouraged, and a better appreciation of what acts as a barrier to such agency. Also, in terms of the research itself, I learned to be more realistic about how much could be achieved within the scope of the nominated research process; and how much of the accumulated evidence could be employed within the

parameters of the thesis. In spite of ample advice, I had tended to be too ambitious in terms of what could be achieved during the limited process: but this has left material for future publications. The major insights I gained as researcher were not so much focused on 'conceptions of sustainable development', important though these are to the research evidence. What I gained from most was the involvement in a dialectical process of research and the development of that process. In a very small way it characterised the conceptual emancipation that might emerge from a dialectical engagement. It is not unproblematic; it can be uncomfortable; and it is not a process that can be 'controlled'. For me, however, it did underline the value of inclusive and discursive engagement; and it cast a spotlight on the general lack of multidimensional inclusive debate that currently characterises the formal New Zealand discourse. This raises political issues about the role of government and government agencies; the powerful coalitions they engage in; who is included in or excluded from decision-making; and, ultimately, who holds the power in such coalitions.

As is common with research explorations, this inquiry has tended to open up more questions than it has resolved. Much still remains to be done, and some of the issues to be picked up are outlined in the concluding section of this chapter. Clearly, there are publications to be produced, and I envisage these including not only academic publications, but practical and popular articles that highlight some of the outcomes of this research – for example, publications for industry journals. The evidence from this research will inform my future research and my teaching; and some aspects of the research will provide topics for student research. There are further questions to be explored in my ongoing research with companies. For example, it was not possible during the term of the research to assess change in company behaviour and practice and the processes leading to change; although one indicator of eco-efficiency changes taking place over the period of the research emerged from the performance of companies on the national survey that I was conducting annually, where there were some clear trends towards improved environmental management (Appendix 10). However, it will take ongoing research with the companies to determine if and how conceptual and practical changes take place as a result of any values shifts that occurred during this initial period of research. Perhaps most crucially, there are some national policy issues to which I can make a contribution; and the value of the

research with the organisations from the broader context is that this has opened doors for such liaison.[259]

10.4 Reflecting on the Evidence

The evidence that I gained from the research engagement – or, at least, a 'slice' of that comprehensive range of evidence – has formed the basis of my narrative in the empirical chapters. It tells a story of a general level of appropriation of the sustainable development discourse through the very 'natural', 'reified' process of management which is so taken-for-granted by administrators and corporate managers that its impacts are generally undetected and unquestioned until a mirror is held up to them. What the mirror has revealed is an intricate but as yet incomplete picture of 'managing business and sustainable development' in New Zealand. It has also exposed discourses at business and government levels, as well as some counter-hegemonic views that oppose these major discourses. A picture has emerged where there was, previously, a gap; a discourse where there was a silence. It has revealed something about the complexity of human nature; about structural hegemony that makes change difficult; and about institutional and political inertia. It has raised questions about how individuals, organisations and institutions might change; and about how change that includes redistribution of power may be opposed. It has identified some 'contradictions' in the corporate capitalist system in New Zealand, and some areas of vulnerability which mean that its own appropriation of the agenda of sustainable development is less than complete.

The key discovery was not merely the evidence that the concept was in the process of being appropriated, but the almost 'invisible' means by which this occurred – invisible because part of the naturalised structures to which people have become accustomed and which seem 'right'. The theorisation was central to providing the

[259] Examples of being invited to participate in different fora that occurred during the period of the research included a presentation for business at an Auckland seminar fronted by John Elkington; invitations to meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the lead up to the WSSD; an invitation to speak at the inaugural meeting of the New Zealand Environmental Managers Forum; contributions to the Standards New Zealand and Social Audit New Zealand seminars; a conference of business people and politicians organised by Business New Zealand; the annual conference of the Chemicals Industry Council of New Zealand; and a lecture on business and sustainable development for the WEA.

lens that revealed this. The other aspect of the appropriation that makes it a complex challenge is its multi-dimensional nature: not only is the concept appropriated and de-radicalised by conservative business interests to present a more appealing 'business case'; the appropriation is occurring through coalition with government; and, at a broader level, through coalition with international bodies such as the UN. In New Zealand, the coalition is most clearly exposed through analysis of the reflexivity between the documented business case and government accounts where the same assumptions and rhetoric predominate: otherwise, it is generally difficult to detect, although the conservative mainstream of business and some corporations are clearly keeping an eye on this coalition. In addition, the fact that such documentation plays a role in socially constructing sustainable development means that the 'business case' is strongly placed for legitimation and institutionalisation. The language, agenda and silences set in place by such a coalition of interests are 'objectified' by the documentary evidence.

However, the story also unearths the fact that the hegemonic appropriation is not complete; and, here, the process of the research was also important. While a few participants started from counter-hegemonic positions, I believe the dawning recognition of other ways of perceiving reified and naturalised constructs started to emerge for corporate managers from the research process. I have indicated in Chapter Nine that these were generally not 'gestalt' experiences; and that 'new conceptions' wavered and flickered. Nevertheless, a brief review conducted towards the end of the research process did indicate that some participants were continuing to reflect on new conceptions that arose during the meetings (Chapter Nine). While there is insufficient evidence to be over-optimistic about the potential for change, the case is not totally pessimistic either. The impact of a more deliberative, democratic discourse allowed people to open up some silences of which they had not been aware (Kureishi, 2003). It revealed that, if there is a particular New Zealand inflection on sustainable development at the moment, it is the business case that is adhered to; but that radical democratic vein of thought that has characterised New Zealand for a long time is also evident in the counter-hegemonic responses that emerged. Furthermore, the current government has within it politicians noted for radical views that are a source of concern to business, but which might bring force to a more radical debate on sustainable development.

Nevertheless, the chief political theme to emerge was the 'deficit of democracy' in a country where we take our 'democracy' for granted; and the fact that this exposes a gap between the stated goals of the current government and some areas of its action. What the research has exposed is the lacunae in democratic discourse around sustainable development despite a potential platform having been provided by the preparation for a New Zealand Sustainable Development Strategy. Part of that concern is that the government itself may have become appropriated by groups whose 'business' it is to maintain power and thereby limit the discourse. The international debate already highlights the hegemony of such corporate interests; and it would be true to say that, not only in New Zealand, but internationally, governments find it difficult to know what to do about such hegemony over the sustainable development agenda. It may, indeed, suit their own purposes that corporates and their front groups have assumed a dominant role. It perhaps indicates a role for social movements in New Zealand – not all of them at present focused on sustainable development – to work together, as O'Connor (1998) envisages, in order to open up the discourse of sustainable development and to work with government to envision a more deliberative democracy based upon the principles of sustainable development. This also indicates a possible future direction for my research programme.

It appears that the New Zealand government's role in terms of sustainable development is not yet fully determined, leaving space for democratic discourse. One government agency appears to have taken the lead currently in promoting a particular discourse of sustainable development that is a social artefact taken from the business case, employing this as if it were the dominant discourse. This step has played a role in repressing other discourses of sustainable development, since it appears to give the 'business case' the stamp of authority. It points to inequalities of power being centrally inscribed in a discourse that excludes the majority of people. The problem appears to have become not only one of too little discourse, but the 'wrong' sorts, focused on political sustainability, not emancipation. The concern is that this case has become internalised and may be set to become institutionalised. It does not yet represent a homogeneous discourse at government level;[260] and some indicators of

[260] The Ministry for Economic Development, for example, is promoting a continuation of Knight's work with local communities.

opposition to the 'business case' *and* to the deficit of democracy are appearing, even if not yet vociferous (PRISM/Knight, 2000; PCE, 2002b). However, there is as yet no clear 'democratic forum' that opposes the business discourse, even though some possible seeds for this have emerged. The identified groups that might become part of such a forum are, as yet, disparate, and they also compete in a variety of ways. One thing that emerged from this research and was strengthened in a parallel research project that grew out of it was the potential role of the union movement as part of a social movement for driving the discourse of sustainable development forward in a democratic way.[261] All of these groups potentially hold constitutive power for change. Opposition also erupts from the mainstream business lobby, although for different reasons: their fear of a socialist government too avidly embracing sustainable development appears to be based on a spectre of eco-modernisation being employed as a state-led accumulation strategy that may lead to further legislation. They see *government* as 'appropriating' the sustainable development agenda.

One question we might ask is whether it *matters* if government embraces eco-modernisation in place of sustainable development. Would this not result in cleaner, more efficient industry in New Zealand that is ecologically resource-conscious and socially aware of the needs of its employees, community, suppliers and consumers? One government vision is clearly that of employment-creation through technology, of which this eco-modernist vision of sustainable development could be deemed to be a part.[262] However, the deficit in such a vision for the current government, in terms of the social/equity goals it stands for, is that key core themes of sustainable development are overlooked in this paradigm: it represses precisely the social/equity strand of the agenda that resonates with government goals. The struggle is between

[261] The initial interview held with a Senior Economist at the CTU was followed up in a parallel research project with senior managers of Affiliates to the CTU to discover their conceptions of sustainable development; whether they saw the construct as a possible driver of union renewal; and the role they might see for unions as drivers of sustainable development in New Zealand society. The interesting thing here was the very different responses received that focused on social and equity issues and held to the 'strong' end of the weak-strong heuristic. These participants had no difficulty in understanding the role of the capitalist paradigm in creating unsustainability. It was a reminder that I still have other audiences to work with.

[262] For example, the Minister of Employment had commented that he was interested to know how the 'environment' could result in new jobs (personal communication, 1999).

business (and other) interests in maintaining current societal and institutional arrangements and the aspiration toward radical change, of which this government might be a part. This is where the 'problem' for government is located; and where the sustainable development discourse threatens to exacerbate government-business relations. The social-justice/equity debate that is integral to sustainable development as opposed to eco-modernism goes to the heart of capital labour relations; and government, for all its opposition to business hegemony, relies upon a working relationship with business in order to govern. Nevertheless, this is a government that has the fibre to take unpopular decisions that some elements of business abhor: signing the Kyoto Protocol; refusing to join the war in Iraq; and maintaining New Zealand's anti-nuclear stance. As already suggested in the Conclusions to Chapters Eight and Nine, the government's own 'power' may rest in Paine's goal of 'harnessing' that of the people; and that will pivot on more deliberative democracy to empower the populace, giving them a voice.

10.5 Spaces of Hope[263]

Finally, I return to my original question about meta-narratives, and whether the radical principles of sustainable development might inform a narrative for an environmentally and socially sound society in New Zealand. It is a problematic question for many reasons, not least being the 'dangerous liaison' with the economic growth paradigm that characterises sustainable development (Chapters Three and Five); and the evidence unearthed in the research of the concept's appropriation to a modernist paradigm of eco-efficiency. Furthermore, New Zealand is a bi-cultural, and, increasingly, multi-cultural society where different groups may 'require' different ideologies. New Zealand, though small, does not represent a homogeneous society and it may not be possible to assume homogeneity of what people might aspire to in terms of 'the good life'. The indigenous culture is based upon a strong relationship with nature that might be termed 'sustainable', albeit learned in pragmatic ways and through the creation early on of some 'scarcity' as a driver. Other cultures are contributing to the multicultural nature of New Zealand society, bringing their own relationships with nature to the environmental problematic in

[263] Harvey, 2000.

New Zealand, and coming to terms with a different physical as well as cultural environment. The question becomes 'whose' concept of the good life we are talking about. The research evidence is based on a range of conceptions from what was a culturally diverse group of New Zealanders, but these are shaped chiefly around the concept of capitalist growth as providing 'the good life'. While it is currently difficult to envisage a 'good life' compatible with social life lived in real space and time in multicultural New Zealand, it might be possible, through a discursive process, to arrive at a set of epistemic principles that takes account of the time and space specific constitution of social life.

Fundamentally, it would mean reaching some agreement about what the social relations of production and consumption are to be. For the majority of the research participants, this was foreseen as capitalist; yet a number of people, including government representatives, envisaged a 'softer' form of capitalism, less contingent on 'growth at all costs', although the growth metaphor ('gentler'/'kinder') remained central to their discourse. Even the vision provided of a Schumacherian re-make of society through local enterprise trusts (Chapter Nine) was not based on a shift from the capitalist economy, but on one eschewing its 'extreme' application. Some discussion arose in the interviews as to whether there could be more 'benign' forms of capitalism based on a compromise that retained the historical 'benefits' without the historical impacts. The concept of 'sustainable capitalism' was discussed at several, but not all, meetings, which met with some approval ('I like that!' GM-A, Electricity Utility; and 'That's what we are doing,' Chairman, NZBCSD); although it still appeared to be equated with 'viability'. One CEO repudiated the notion of what he called 'guided capitalism' because the real issue was resource allocation and the making of policy, and he doubted the 'quality of the guiding decision-making' was available because 'humans are frail; they make mistakes all the time,' (CEO, Mining Company). This left something of a vacuum in terms of how decisions were, in reality, to be made and who was to make them; but fundamentally underlined the right of élites who are presumed to have that decision-making capacity to take charge. The conservative NZBR was already alert to groups that wished to 'remake capitalism', and scathing of their purposes and wisdom (Henderson, 2001). What the corporate interviews tended to unearth was a vision of capitalism with an environmentally friendly face, treading more lightly on the earth (and conserving

resources for future use); while inducting consumers to purchase environmentally friendly goods and services that ensure future production. However, this 'business' case does not make a case for the ecological rationality of capitalism (Dryzek, in O'Connor, 1994). Historically, capitalism *requires* economic growth; and it was unsurprising that corporate leaders and government saw their first concern as the promotion of growth: it is what makes their roles and what they stand for 'sustainable'. This led to the inversion of the argument, made many times during the research, to one that stresses growth must come *first* in order that ecological and social justice can be 'afforded': essentially commodifying these values. This view relies on the substitutability of resources (BusinessNZ, and Chapter Eight); but does not account for the fact that there is no 'substitute' for the assimilative capacity of the biosphere or the planet's finite supply of low entropy and order (Dryzek, 1994). Some see the answer in a shift from economic activities based on consumption of materials to 'informational capitalism';[264] although the evidence suggests that this may not reduce consumption, but off-load production on to other (developing) societies (Dryzek, 1994). Overall, the crux of the problem for government will be how to steer New Zealand towards sustainability by redirecting the economy while, at the same time, creating worthwhile and dignified employment.

One thing that was notably difficult to evoke in the inquiry was a focus on the future. It can be argued that the capitalist paradigm, which generally neglects the future, is part of the reason for this: the market discounts anticipated future costs and benefits at the prevailing interest rate, creating a 'norm' that restricts future-vision. Nor do markets have mechanisms for dealing with 'common' goods: private profit reduces concern about damage to other parties, including the environment. These historical contingencies of capitalism cast doubt on any paradigm of 'sustainable capitalism': an attractive concept in some ways, but, in the end, an oxymoron. Even understood as 'perpetually viable capitalism', which some participants clearly had in mind, it fails to take account of the inherent contradictions of capitalism. As Dryzek points out (1994), this difficulty is compounded by the relationship between capitalism, liberal democracy and the administrative state – as the coalitions in New Zealand

[264] The New Zealand government aspires to this model, for example, by ensuring that the viticulture industry in New Zealand becomes a provider of research information as well as production (MED, personal communication, February, 2003).

reveal. This relationship may produce actions that look like solutions – the 'business case' is an example. However, the solutions are often based on displacement of the problem elsewhere: as noted, production of goods in developing countries is one instance and carries with it the loss of jobs in New Zealand. Additionally, the hierarchical conditions the administrative state relies upon have the effect of obstructing free transmission of information, which makes inclusive democratic discourse problematic. 'Centralising' approaches to problem-solving (Dryzek, 1994:182), which is what the 'business case' in New Zealand comes close to, overlook what is key to an effective problem-solving community and to sustainable development – inclusive, decentralised discourse, where good argument prevails over hierarchical authority. The coalition of a hierarchical élite controlling parts of the sustainable development discourse in New Zealand militates against such discursive problem-solving and undermines the central principle of equity.

Paehlke's (1988) answer to this is to reduce the domain of the administrative state and increase that of liberal democracy, with more openness in policy debates, public hearings, interest group activity, right-to-know laws and public inquiries. Several of these strategies formed part of the process that led to the resource management legislation in New Zealand enacted in the RMA (1991); but they have not been applied to a public debate on sustainable development. Paehlke (1994) sees the energy needed to confront environmental crises being best generated through the mobilisation of democratic participation; and Dryzek (1994) points out that the *positive* moments in the record of environmental improvement through governmental actions support this claim for inclusivity: such improvements have tended to rest on government listening to the people. Dryzek (1994) suggests that, out of the confusion and contradiction of state-dominated forms of practice can arise 'spaces' for more truly democratic action that involve different social movements - including indigenous autonomy movements - that are grounded in communal concerns: what O'Connor characterises as the 'manifold resistances that flower in the cracks and interstices of the dysfunctioning world economy,' (O'Connor, M. 1994:72).

The question is whether a shift to more democratic participation can be effected without 'sweeping structural transformation' (Dryzek, 1994:185), which, as Marcuse (1964) points out would inevitably result in the *further suffering* of the poorest

people. One of the key areas, as the international union movement emphasized at the WSSD (2002), is the maintenance and creation of employment and of appropriate conditions of production and consumption (ICFTU, 2002). Like O'Connor (O'Connor, J., 1994; 1998), Dryzek draws upon the incipient power of social movements as an agent of change. Many such movements, despite some essential differences, do strive for more discursive or consensual decision-making – for the kind of communicative rationality that Habermas believed could transcend the boundaries of struggles and discourses. It is in the public sphere that any reconstruction of the political economy on ecologically rational lines is likely to be effected (Dryzek, 1994). However, Dryzek qualifies his claim by pointing out that what has so far emerged from certain kinds of 'public inquiries' and 'participatory' models of planning represents only 'incipient' discursive designs. They still fall short of the ideals of free discourse, having failed to constitute *autonomous* public spheres: they have tended to be 'sponsored' by those holding political power to manipulate the agenda.[265]

The principles of discursive democratisation could be seen as the means to effect a vision of a different political economy for New Zealand, and some indications of this, though limited, did arise from the corporate interviews. The economist from the Council of Trade Unions envisaged the means of production and consumption being organised through more co-operative enterprises, which would require discursive democratisation of those means; and he was the only participant to come close to voicing a new meta-narrative based on sustainable development when he posed the idea that the concept of a 'developed country' might be based upon the adoption of 'sustainable development' as a set of principles to guide the country (Chapter Nine). He noted that there had been a lot of 'space' between 'unfettered' capitalism and strong socialism and conceived of sustainable development sitting somewhere in the middle of these extremes, and being valued for its social and environmental agendas, not as a means for corporates to increase 'shareholder returns' (Chapter Nine). In keeping with this vision of a co-operatively based political economy, the community

[265] Something of the same conclusion was reached by Maori in September, 2003, after the government-sponsored 'foreshore hui' related to the preservation of public access to New Zealand's foreshore. It was concluded that government had already made its decisions, and that these would alienate the traditional rights of Maori over the foreshore under the Treaty of Waitangi.

development leader forecast much more local enterprise based on the principle of subsidiarity, with 'the highest level of responsibility at the lowest level' and 'materials at the highest use within the shortest distance'; pointing out that the 'principles of sustainability ... all revolve around community' (Chapter Nine). Knight's work with local communities came closest, perhaps, to engaging people directly in democratic discourse whereby they could co-operatively envisage the sustainable future of their locality: a model which Knight believes could be transposed to the national level (Chapter Nine).

New Zealand is, by tradition, a country where alternative social movements have thrived. The New Zealand Values Party of the 1970s led the world in terms of a formalised 'green' political agenda (Rainbow, 1989a, 1989b; Hope and Jesson, 1993). The currently out-of-office Alliance Party, which partly grew from that tradition, is described by O'Connor (1994; 1998) as arguably the *most developed* of the various green and 'red green' movements worldwide.[266] The Green Party in New Zealand has garnered sufficient support to become a coalition partner in government. Going further back, New Zealand was one of the first countries to have an organised environmental movement, which has had a powerful impact on policy and legislation; although it is open to question whether it has encouraged inclusive or discursive dialogue. For such a small population (or because of that), there are many independent social movements focused on organic production, permaculture, and self-sufficient life-styles; or opposed to such developments as genetically engineered food production. Maori sense of community and their relationship with nature provide important ways of learning about living with each other and nature. In addition, the tendency for social movements to spontaneously combust in New Zealand is notable, and was witnessed in the anti-apartheid and anti-nuclear movements. Currently, a sustainable development forum is emerging under the leadership of the Royal Society which might mark the beginning of a democratic forum. However, its own autonomy is, perhaps, jeopardised by a desire stated early on to seek government funding for its activities and a degree of 'authority' through establishing a Sustainable Development Council. A level of exclusivity also

[266] The Labour/Alliance Coalition, 1999-2002, represented one more reason why business was generally still anti-government in its stance: the Alliance Party does have a vision of a means of production and consumption based upon a different political economy.

characterises its composition and discourse. In addition to this, the major environmental legislation, the RMA, represents devolution of authority for environmental decision-making to the local level, and is built upon community consultation and participation. Although central government has so far given relatively little attention to the principles of Agenda 21 since its signature (PCE, 2002a), and although New Zealand has developed nothing like the Local Agenda 21 programmes that have grown in parts of the UK, some cities and local authorities have begun to base their governance on Agenda 21 principles and involving the local community in decision-making.[267] This is in keeping with the central role of local authorities in implementing the principles of Agenda 21 that was envisioned at UNCED; and the positive results these authorities are beginning to reap may have broader impacts.[268] The above represent some 'spaces of hope' (Harvey, 2000), indicating that there is a 'mass of sense' in the New Zealand community, waiting to be tapped; and that a process of democratic discourse might lead to some agreement about the social relations of production and consumption for a sustainable New Zealand, with economic activity relocated to a greater extent 'within society' (Gowdy, 1999 and Chapter 3).

At the same time, business needs to be involved in this discourse of delivering sustainable development at the local level. This would mean its engaging in 'genuine' stakeholder dialogue. Here, business would not hold asymmetrical power over the dialogue, but would represent one participant (itself a 'stakeholder') in a discursive formation of equal partners that included the local community, the local authority, Maori, social movements, trade unions and the private sector. The 'business case' might play a constitutive role in such a discourse; and even discover for itself a course that brought its goals closer to sustainable development. The creation of employment is crucial to the development of a sustainable local economy; and, despite the attractive vision of local enterprise trusts, it is unlikely that 'industry'

[267] For example, Waitakere City, Auckland, Hamilton and Christchurch are leading examples of cities following the principles of Agenda 21 to promote sustainable development at community level, including the goal of attracting business to these cities.

[268] However one outcome of the devolution of responsibility for enforcement of the RMA is that there is some 'patchiness' in standards of enforcement and evidence of industry seeking out areas where enforcement is less rigorous, or moving off-shore. There needs to be a closer meshing of local initiatives with national policy and standards without foregoing the benefits of autonomy at the local level.

will cease to be the major creator of wealth and employment in the near future. It is, therefore, encouraging that the Ministry of Economic Development is seeking integration of economic development issues with sustainable development and is trialling Knight's model of community participation in decision-making. Redirecting the local economy in a way that empowers local people and includes industry in a more equitable partnership with the community suggests a tough, but possible, future vision for New Zealand. Thus, the real importance of the government's 'Action Plan' (2003) may not be merely what it achieves to make Auckland 'more sustainable', but the fact that all government departments are required to make sustainable development a central principle for their activities. This can help to provide the policy parameters that are necessary for local initiatives for sustainable development to succeed, as long as government agencies subscribe to the principles of power-sharing and local emancipation.

Overall, this indicates that my own plans for continuing this research should rest upon such democratic discourse with other researchers and partners. If my research is to 'make a difference', the task is clearly too big for one research dimension: it calls for the kind of 'co-ordinated' approach to research that government is currently saying it wishes to foster. This suggests that my plans should include working with researchers from areas such as economics, local and regional planning, Maori, environmental policy, and science, together with practitioners, business people, local communities, trade unions and representatives of social movements, to begin to theorise some answers to what would represent a sustainable New Zealand. In other words, the research itself needs to be a part of the equitable discursive formation around sustainable development that it is advocating. This might ensure that my work plays a practical part in contributing to 'change in the direction of a more open and democratically discursive alternative' (Dryzek, 1994) to the narrative of sustainable development in New Zealand; and that it will 'make a difference'.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Business Charter for Sustainable Development: Principles for Environmental Management: 1991

The Sixteen Principles:

1. Corporate priority
To recognise environmental management as among the highest corporate priorities and as a key determinant to sustainable development; to establish policies, programmes and practices for conducting operations in an environmentally sound manner.

2. Integrated management
To integrate these policies, programmes and practices fully into each business as an essential element of management in all its functions.

3. Process of improvement
To continue to improve corporate policies, programmes and environmental performance, taking into account technical developments, scientific understanding, consumer needs and community expectations, with legal regulations as a starting point; and to apply the same environmental criteria internationally.

4. Employee education
To educate, train and motivate employees to conduct their activities in an environmentally responsible manner.

5. Prior assessment
To assess environmental impacts before starting a new activity or project and before decommissioning a facility or leaving a site.

6. Products and services
To develop and provide products or services that have no undue environmental impact and are safe in their intended use, that are efficient in their consumption of energy and natural resources, and that can be recycled, reused or disposed of safely.

7. Customer advice
To advise, and where relevant educate, customers, distributors and the public in the safe use, transportation, storage and disposal of products provided; and to apply similar consideration to the provision of services.

8. Facilities and operations
To develop, design and operate facilities and conduct activities taking into consideration the efficient use of energy and materials, the sustainable use of renewable resources, the minimisation of adverse environmental impact and waste generation, and the usage and responsible disposal of residual wastes.

9. Research
To conduct or support research on the environmental impacts of raw materials, products, processes, emissions and wastes associated with the enterprise and on the means of minimizing such adverse impacts.

10. Precautionary approach
To modify the manufacture, marketing or use of products or services or the conduct of activities, consistent with scientific and technical understanding, to prevent serious or irreversible environmental degradation.

11. Contractors and suppliers
To promote the adoption of these principles by contractors acting on behalf of the enterprise, encouraging and, where appropriate, requiring improvement in their practices to make them consistent with those of the enterprise; and to encourage the wider adoption of these principles by suppliers.

12. Emergency preparedness
To develop and maintain, where significant hazards exist, emergency preparedness plans in conjunction with the emergency services, relevant authorities and the local community, recognizing potential trans-boundary impacts.

13. Transfer of technology
To contribute to the transfer of environmentally sound technology and management methods through the industrial and public sections.

14. Contributing to the common effort
To contribute to the development of public policy and to business, governmental and intergovernmental programmes and educational initiatives that will enhance environmental awareness and protection.

15. Openness to concerns
To foster openness and dialogue with employees and the public, anticipating and responding to their concerns about the potential hazards and impacts of operations, products, wastes or services, including those of trans-boundary or global significance.

16. Compliance and reporting
To measure environmental performance; to conduct regular environmental audits and assessments of compliance with company requirements, legal requirements and these principles; and periodically to provide appropriate information to the Board of Directors, shareholders, employees, the authorities and the public.

APPENDIX 2

'Weak – Strong' Heuristic and Matrix Developed for the Empirical Research

(i) The 'Weak-Strong' Heuristic

'WEAK' SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	'STRONG' SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
Functional, mainstream positions	Political, progressive positions
Sustainable 'growth'	Sustainable development
The narrative of 'management'	The discourse of sustainable development and democracy.
'political sustainability'	***'sustainability'***

(ii) The Matrix Drawn from the Epistemological Framework

Criteria	'Weak' Sustainability	'Strong' Sustainability
Capitalism	Sustainable business is possible within capitalist governance as long as eco-efficiency is observed; sustained growth is the imperative	The capitalist political economy is the cause of unsustainable development; capitalism cannot even ensure its own sustainability.
Consumption	Regarded as essential to growth, but the emphasis is upon the construction of 'greener' consumption, and a lighter 'ecological footprint'.	Consumption is at the heart of the sustainable development debate, it has come to represent the power of a minority, and has been used to create 'false consciousness' which supports the hegemony of the powerful.
Democracy	Taken-for-granted in the North that Northern politics, policies and practices are already 'democratic'.	Democracy represents THE goal of radical sustainable development – it needs liberal, democratic political forms and the devolution of power to construct a sustainable society: calls for equity, transparency and democracy.
Discourse	Regarded as 'conversation'	A discursive, dialectical process is seen as necessary to counter simplistic understandings of sustainable development and to problematise the concept.
Domination	Not taken into account except to acknowledge human domination of nature. Not part of the equation.	The environmental and social problematic is attributed to domination of nature and human nature.
Eco-efficiency	Seen as a major part of the answer to environmental problems and the sustainable future of business.	While more sparing use of resources is essential, this is not the answer to the fundamental causes of unsustainable development, which are moral and political
Ecological sustainability	Looking after the resource base has assumed new significance – a new 'conservation' ethic that is seen as ensuring corporate sustainability.	Ecological and social/political sustainability are inextricably intertwined. Use of resources is a political act and currently reflects domination of the powerful few.

Economic growth	The solution to the problematic is seen as resting in 'green', 'qualitative' growth – but growth is fundamental and can solve some environmental and social problems.	Profound scepticism about continuing economic growth and whether it relieves poverty or safeguards the environment.
Emancipation	Not a consideration.	A major goal of strong sustainable development.
Equity	Taken as little more than equitable access to resources, if considered.	Calls for democratic equity in all aspects of life for all people: fundamental shifts in the sharing of power envisioned.
Futurity	Short-term views are promulgated by the short-term planning of governments and business. Belief that sustainability can be reached in a relatively short period of time through eco-modernist approaches.	Long-term visions are called for which require change to begin now. The time-span of change may be several hundred years.
Globalisation	Regarded as 'a good thing' – increases green market opportunities (and brings Northern legislation and practices to the South).	Seen as anomalous to sustainability – unjust to less powerful 'local' interests and forms part of the domination by a small, powerful section of the North.
Hegemony	Not recognised and not uncovered.	To be uncovered through the critique of power and domination as part of the problematising of sustainable development.
Ideology	Not recognised as being profoundly important to the sustainable development debate. Tends to be applied pejoratively to those 'ideologies' that oppose corporate power (such as Marxism).	Recognises that sustainable development itself is ideologically constructed and contested.
Management	Vision of a management paradigm that governs the world (Northern-led management; ecocracy/surveillance).	The Northern management paradigm is part of the problem.
Need	'Needs' to be met by supplying goods of the North to the South using Northern management structures and new technologies.	Meet not only the basic physical need of the poor, but their need for education, emancipation, autonomy and rights to their own culture and democracy.
Policy-making	Seen as an important part of the answer to unsustainability, especially if business can have a role in policy definition.	Seen as part of the problem. Policy-making is ham-strung by governments' focus on attracting scarce capital and their reliance on retaining business.
Poverty	Can be alleviated by sustainable growth and 'more sensitive' economic growth.	Poverty has increased in the South and the North during a period of unprecendented economic growth and is the outcome of inequitable policies and the exercise of power in favour of the rich of the North.

Power	Not openly confronted as a cause of the problem – those who hold power tend to promote 'weak' sustainability and attempt to dominate the discourse.	It is power and who holds the power, to what purpose, that is the key question. Power does not necessarily have a pejorative meaning (Foucault).
Values	Seen as important, and 'values shifts' are advocated, but this is often at the personal or operational level – *green* consumers purchasing *green* products from *green* companies – not at the top levels of societal decision-making.	Seen as fundamental to any significant change – but it is at the top societal level of values and ethics that the narrative of sustainable development needs to begin to operate, rather than shifting responsibility to the *green consumer*.

APPENDIX 3
Interview Procedures and Research Questions

A Preparation

Preliminary discussion of the research rationale and goals was conducted with the core focus group at the final workshop of 2001, ready for the interviews in 2002. For other participants, and focus group members in the interim, discussions were conducted by telephone, and followed up with email correspondence. This procedure was used, firstly, in order to be able to answer queries or concerns about the research without delay; and because letters sometimes become buried in the correspondence of busy people and it was important to optimise on the level of interest they showed and to keep to the research schedule, which, fitted in with full-time employment, was quite tight. The interviews themselves started with some 'scene-setting' in terms of the key issues that participants needed to be aware of, and to locate the research agenda within their own setting by discussing their role and responsibilities and familiarise them with the research goals. Time was allowed for this in the one hour interviews scheduled. The preparation for the longer-term engagement with the core focus group is described in Chapter Six.

B Interview Questions

The questions arose from the research matrix constructed to pull together the concepts and themes from the epistemological framework and the literature review, and were driven by the weak-strong heuristic that arose from this. The questions were grouped in four categories, although these necessarily flooded into each other, and the questions were asked in a spiral fashion and referred back to when this facilitated the discussion.

Questions 1 and 2 explored individual conceptions of sustainable development; how these had become framed; and the major influences on these constructions:

1 **What does the conception of sustainable development mean to you?**
[Its chief characteristics; core themes; scope of the concept].

2 **What do you think have been the chief influences on the way you understand sustainable development?**

[Core influences that are constructing sustainable development.]

Questions 3, 4 and 5 focused on business conceptions in general, as these were perceived by participants, as well as those held to in the individual company or organisation. These questions looked for any core themes emerging in the conceptualisation of the construct; the influences that were shaping business understanding; and what sustainable development meant for business in practical terms The goal was to get closer to comparing philosophy with practices, and to discover whether business conceptions and practices were constructed within the 'business case'/eco-modernist framework, or according to other principles:

3 **How do you think business understands the concept?**

[Core themes; what business actually 'does' about sustainable development; in later interviews, whether it was perceived that business was appropriating the concept.]

4 **What do you think are the chief influences on business' conceptions of sustainable development?**

[Who or what is shaping the business agenda?]

5 **What does sustainable development mean for business in practical terms?**

[What is the nature of the changes that need to be made? What might become the chief drivers? What are the obstacles?]

Question 6 opened up the exploration of the radical social agenda of sustainable development and explored whether participants were aware of the origins of the concept, why it was coined, and what it was designed to address:

6 **Why do you think the concept of sustainable development was coined/invented?**

[What were the aspects of *un*sustainable development that meant we needed a new term and a new concept?]

The next set of questions introduced a more overtly 'political' theme that invited reflection on the dominant growth paradigm of the capitalist model and its possible influence over the agenda of sustainable development:

7 **What are the 'silences' in the discourse of sustainable development? Have you noted any issues that seem important to you but are rarely discussed?**
[What is *not* up for debate or discussion?]

8 **To what extent do you think we can move towards sustainable development within current social and economic arrangements?**
[And what kinds of things would have to change?]

The final group of questions invited broader speculation about a 'vision' of sustainable business in a sustainable society; issues of responsibility for the shift to sustainable development (in view of the purported appropriation of the concept by business); and sought an indication of whether participants had a grasp of the 'scale' of the problem and issues of futurity:

9 **What would business and society 'look like' if they were guided by an ethic of sustainable development? What kind of 'vision' do you have of that?**
[What are the things that would need to change?]

10 **Whose responsibility is it to help make, or to drive, the shift to sustainable development?**
[What people or groups have, or should have, power over this?]

11 **What kind of time-frame are we looking at?**
[How long until we shall have made significant progress? What kind of time-frame do you think we have to make improvements? Projections about futurity.]

In addition to the questions in the schedule, themes were teased out as they occurred in the discussions; and sometimes the discussion was re-routed to return to key questions when it was felt that these had been avoided or diverted.

APPENDIX 4

Composition of the Corporate Focus Group and Other Corporate Participants

(i) The Corporate Focus Group

INDUSTRY SECTOR	TITLE OF PARTICIPANT & CODE
Chemicals	Division SH&E Advisor (SHEA)
Communications (telecommunications)	Corporate Positioning Manager (CPM)
Construction	Group Environment Manager (GEM)
Electricity Utility	General Manager – Assets (GM –A)
Energy Services	Environmental Consultant (EC)
Food and Beverages	National Environmental Manager (NEM); and Regional Environmental Manager (REM)
Gas Utility	Director Corporate Services (DCS); and Health and Safety Manager (HSM)
Insurance	Marketing Assistant (MA)
Manufacturing (Fertilizer)	Strategic Planner (SP) Technical Manager (TM)
Manufacturing (Meat Processing)	Environmental Advisor (EA)
Oil Company	Senior Consultant, Safety, Health and Environment (SCSHE); and Communications Manager (CM)
Primary Production (Forestry)	General Manager Environment, Health, Safety and Risk (GMHSER); and Environmental Manager (EM)
Primary Production (Fruit)	Market Access and Technical Manager (MATM)
Retailing	Environmental Co-ordinator (EC)
Transport	GM, Health, Safety and Environment (GMHSE)
Water Utility	Design Services Manager (DSM)

(ii) Other Corporate Participants

(a) Chief Executive Officers and other Corporate Leaders

CEO: Electricity Utility

CEO: Gas Utility

CEO: Insurance Company

CEO: Manufacturing (Fertilizers)

CEO: Mining Company

CEO: Primary Production (Fishing)

CEO: Retailing Company

Founder: Retailing Company

(b) Other Senior Managers

Environmental Manager: Oil Company (EM)

Environmental Manager: Primary Production (Fishing) (EM)

APPENDIX 5

Composition of the Corporate Context Group

ORGANISATION	POSITION
Prime Minister's Office (PM's Office)	Former Policy Leader of Sustainable Development Strategy Team
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)	Deputy Director, Environment, and representative at the WSSD
Ministry of Economic Development (MED)	Director; Project Manager.
Chemicals Industry Council (NZCIC)	Executive Director
Packaging Industry Council (PACNZ)	Executive Director
Business New Zealand (BusinessNZ)	Executive Director; and Economist
Business Roundtable (NZBR)	Executive Director
Business Council for Sustainable Development (NZBCSD)	Chairman
Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ)	Manager, Environment
Wellington Chamber of Commerce (WCC)	President
Council of Trade Unions (CTU)	Economist
State Sector Standards Board and Japan/New Zealand Business Council (SSSB/JNZBC)	Chairman of both
Community Development Leader (CDL)	Executive Director
Pacific Rim Institute for Sustainable Management (PRISM) and Auckland University	Senior Lecturer

APPENDIX 6

Publicly Available Documents Analysed (See Chapter Eight)

1 Government and quasi-government documents

2000 Cabinet Policy Committee Paper [CAB (00) M 17/id (1)]

2000 Ministry of Economic Development (MED): *Sustainable Development Key to New Industries,* 14 June, 2000.

2001 PM's Speech: *Proposal for Practical Steps and New Zealand Strategy.*

2001 PM's Speech: *New Zealand Sustainable Development Strategy.*

2001 Proposal: *New Zealand Sustainable Development Strategy.* Part 1

2001 Proposal: *New Zealand Sustainable Development Strategy* (ANNEX 1)

2001 Proposal: *New Zealand Sustainable Development Strategy* (ANNEX 2)

2001 Ministry for the Environment (MfE): *Rio+10 Community Programme*

2001 Ministry for the Environment: *New Zealand Sustainable Development Strategy*

2001 Ministry of Economic Development: *Sustainable Economic Development*, 14 September, 2001

2002 *Government's Approach to Sustainable Development*, August, 2002.

2002 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT): *Cabinet Paper on Preparation for the WSSD*, August, 2002

2002 *New Zealand Country Report to the WSSD*, August, 2002

2002 PM's Address to the WSSD, September, 2002

2002 Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE): *Background Paper: Review of Environmental, Social and Economic Policies.*

2002 Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment: *Sustainable Development in New Zealand: Creating our Future*, August, 2002

2003 Government Programme of Action: *Sustainable Development in New Zealand*, January, 2003

2003 Ministry of Economic Development: Programme of Action: *Sustainable Development for New Zealand. Commentary*

2 Documents from Business Organisations

1999 New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development (NZBCSD): *Corporate Environmental Reporting in New Zealand.* Unpublished Report. NZBCSD, Auckland.

1999 New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development: *Corporate Reporting on Sustainable Development*

2001 New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development: *Guidelines for Sustainable Development Reporting*

New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development: *Definitions; Dedicated to Making a Difference.* www.nzbcsd.org

2001 New Zealand Business Roundtable (NZBR): *'Misguided Virtue: False notions of corporate social responsibility'*, David Henderson. NZBR, Wellington, New Zealand.

2002 Kerr, R. (2002) *'Making Sense of Sustainable Development'.* Address to the Hutt Valley Chamber of Commerce, 25 November, 2002. NZBR.

2002 McDonald, K. (2002) 'Sustainability: Key Issues for New Zealand'. Dunedin Rotary Club Conference: *Sustainable Development: Ours Today, Theirs Tomorrow*, June, 2002.

3 Miscellaneous

2000 Pacific Rim Institute of Sustainable Management (PRISM) and Knight, S. (2000) *Sustainable Development in New Zealand: Here Today, Where Tomorrow? A Discussion Paper.* PCE: Wellington, New Zealand.

2001 Conway, P. (2001) 'Triple Bottom Line' – Just words, or does it mean real change? *Dominion*, 9 October, 2001, p. 20.

2002 New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) (2002) *Unions, Innovation and Sustainable Development.* NZCTU: Wellington, New Zealand.

World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD): *About Us; WBCSD Reports; Sustainable Development*

Upton-on-line, August, 2002

Summit@oneworld: *Summary of the Earth Summit Debate; Reports on the WSSD.*

APPENDIX 7

Research Practicalities: Introducing the Research to the Participants

At the initial Focus Group meeting, the rationale and purpose of the research were explained to the group, and ethical and practical issues discussed and agreed upon. The same issues were covered with the key informants before the individual interviews, although necessarily more succinctly. Items were presented to the group on Power Point slides to ensure that participants fully understood the issues under discussion and could question these.

The following areas were addressed:

- The purpose of the research;
- The two grand tour questions, which were introduced in everyday language;
- Group expectations (some picked up from telephone conversations, but new contributions were also addressed. These focused mostly on that the research was 'for');
- Contractual arrangements for working together, including the Group's commitment to three full-day workshops as well as individual interviews; their assistance in making appointments with CEOs; the two-way nature of the commitment in terms of attendance and confidentiality; researcher and participant responsibilities;
- About the research: how it was to be framed, explained in simple terms;
- Permission to tape record the group and individual sessions;
- Ethical issues: confidentiality; codification of identity; reasons for researcher meeting with CEOs;
- Approval for access to publicly available and in-house company documents;
- The time-span of the research;
- Research outcomes and possible joint industry articles;
- Participants' journals.

APPENDIX 8

Review of Government Social, Environmental and Economic Strategies

Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, 2002.
The Review identifies key central government strategies that have been developed or are under development which are relevant to the principles and programmes of Agenda 21. It notes the purpose of each strategy; its relevance to sustainable development; any targets that are identified; the extent of implementation and agencies responsible for monitoring and development, and highlights linkages made between the various strategies. This summary of the Review focuses only on references to sustainable development and Agenda 21.

1 ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES

Local Government Act 1974
Under review as the Local Government Bill. Proposed purpose for the new Local Government Act includes: 'local government plays a key role in pursuing sustainable development'.

Environment 2010 Strategy
Focus on 'Environmental Management Agenda'. Developed instead of a statement on Sustainable Development.

Bio-diversity Strategy 2000
'Sustainable use' is defined in the strategy as the 'use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity. No explicit reference is made to sustainable development.

Bio-security Strategy (In development)
Currently a 'silence' on SD.

NZ Coastal Policy Statement (1994)
Identifies general principles of SD for the sustainable management of NZ's coastal environment

Oceans Policy (in development)
States that 'human beings are at the centre of concerns for SD'.

Fisheries Environmental Management Strategy (Under development)
No specific comment about SD. Focus is on appropriate balance between 'protection' and 'use' of fisheries resources.

Learning to Care for Our Environment (1998)
[Not strictly a 'strategy' for environmental education, but an MfE Discussion Paper that, in the five intervening years, has still not resulted in a Strategy for Environmental Education - DS].

States that 'moving towards the goal of sustainability requires fundamental changes in human attitudes and behaviour. Progress in this direction is thus critically dependent on education and public awareness'.

National Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy (2001)
States that 'the key principles of the Act are those of sustainability and therefore the Strategy will be a key element of the Government's wider sustainable development policy framework'.

NZ Climate Change Programme (in development)
No comment yet made on the relevance to SD at this stage (June 2002)

Sustainable Land Management Strategy (1996)
States that many land management problems are 'the result of the pursuit of economic and social goals without due regard to environmental needs.'

National Land Transport Strategy (never developed)

NZ Transport Strategy (in development)
States that 'sustainable land transport requires an understanding of how social, economic, cultural and environmental systems interact with one another and how transport contributes [to] or hinders these other systems.'

Hazardous Waste Management Programme (in development)
Comments on the implications for the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of New Zealanders.

New Zealand Waste Strategy (2002)
States that 'Reducing New Zealand's waste is a cornerstone of government's commitment to sustainable development'.

2 SOCIAL STRATEGIES

Local Environment (1996 – obsolete)
Quotation from Agenda 21: 'human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development'

New Zealand Health Strategy (2002)
No reference to the principles of Agenda 21.

Employment Strategy (2000)
States that the principles of Agenda 21 recognise the need to promote employment opportunities. This strategy does not consider any environmental issues associated with attempts to promote 'sustained economic growth'. The strategy only makes 'weak' reference to 'sustainable economic and social development'.

The Social Development Approach (2001)
Reference is made to 'meeting the needs of people now and in the future'. No specific linkages to sustainable development are made.

Tertiary Education Strategy (2002-7, in development)

3 ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

Industry Development Strategy (2000)
A key economic strategy that argues that industry development 'is a key component of sustainable development and is complemented by a range of policies such as those relating to regional development, human capability, the regulation of business, the provision of infrastructure services and the protection and sustainable use of natural resources'.

Regional Development Strategy (2000)
A key economic strategy that identifies a need to integrate economic aspirations with social and environmental needs and to consider long-term effects of development . According to the strategy, 'regional development is about applying sustainable development on a regional scale'

New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2010 (2001)
Has references to Maori concepts of *manaakitanga* and *kaitiakitanga*, and to economic development. States that 'Sustainable development is critical to ensure the benefits of tourism will not be short-lived.'

Innovative New Zealand Strategy (2002)
States that 'government does not believe we can put on hold social and environmental progress and concentrate solely on economic growth. Implicit in the quality of growth we are seeking will be integration of the economic, environmental and social *pillars* (*sic*) of sustainable development.'

Biotechnology Strategy (in development)

Wood Processing Strategy (2002)
Does not refer specifically to principles of sustainable development but is described as likely to have a significant economic, social and environmental impact.

APPENDIX 9

Wuppertal Institute 'Prism of Sustainability'

This Prism of Sustainability was used in the PRISM/Knight Report (2000), '*Sustainable Development in New Zealand: Here Today, Where Tomorrow?*'; and in the Report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (2002), '*Creating Our Future: Sustainable Development in New Zealand*'.

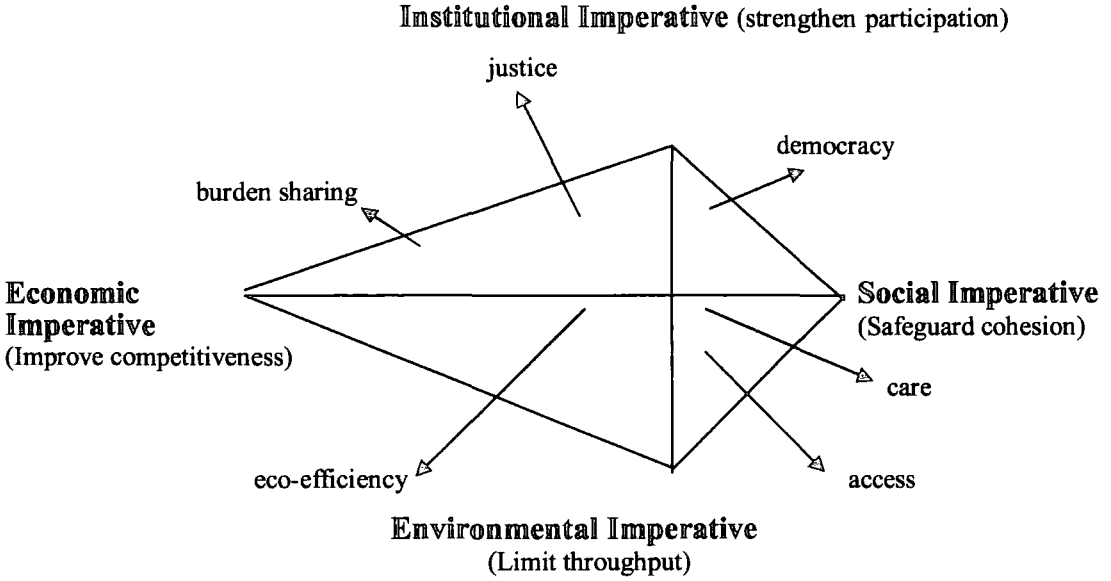

Fig. 1 Prism of Sustainability: Wuppertal Institute, in PRISM/Knight, 2000

The 'Prism of Sustainability' introduces the crucial dimension of the 'institutional' imperative to the economic, social and environmental imperatives of the 'triple bottom line'. This brings issues of 'justice', 'democracy' and 'access' into the equation. It underlines that the focus of the 'full-cost accounting' approach is on the Economic-Environmental dimension, although at least token attention is given to the 'Social' dimension in this approach; whereas the institutional imperative that largely drives the others is not considered.

However, it is notable that the 'Prism' still provides a conventional account of the relationship between 'economic' and 'environmental' imperatives, focused upon 'eco-efficiency' rather than more fundamental change.

APPENDIX 10

Performance of the Core Focus Group Companies on the New Zealand Survey of Corporate Environmental Responsiveness, 1999– 2003.

Total Scores only are given. The companies and industry sectors represented are not named. In an economy as small as that of New Zealand, even to identify companies by industry sector is to risk revealing their identity; and these scores are always kept confidential to the companies that participate in the Survey, although companies are publicly ranked. The given scores are, then, intended only to be broadly indicative of some trends, and they do not correlate to the alphabetical listing of companies: they are listed at random. Years when the company did not participate are designated by an 'x'. Scores are rounded up to the nearest decimal point.

Company/Industry Sector	Total Scores on the Survey (out of 10)				
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
A	6.7	7.3	8.4	7.4	8.8
B	8.2	9.3	8.8	8.3	8.9
C	1.7	x	1.7	3.4	6.5
D	x	x	7.7	8.9	9.1
E	x	2.4	8.0	6.6	x
F	4.5	4.1	9.0	7.3	8.9
G	x	x	9.5	9.0	10.0
H	6.7	8.3	7.7	x	x
I	3.9	3.6	6.2	7.2	8.6
J	5.9	x	9.2	7.6	8.8
K	8.0	5.4	7.4	x	7.4
L	1.7	8.4	7.8	6.0	8.5
M	x	x	x	x	5.4
N	3.3	4.7	5.8	7.6	7.7
O	3.3	4.0	2.5	1.8	4.7
P	3.0	2.9	4.3	7.1	7.6
Q	x	4.9	6.0	7.9	9.0
GROUP AVERAGE	**4.7**	**5.4**	**6.9**	**[6.9]**	**8.0**

Comments:

What can generally be observed is steady improvement in company scores. However, there are some anomalies. Some companies later admitted that they had over-estimated their performance on the first Survey; but had later come to realise its usefulness to them, and the fact that it was only useful and a guide to progress if they were rigorous in their scoring. In some cases, a dip or sudden rise in scores signifies a change of personnel; and, in at least one case, I am aware that scores were adjusted upwards one year when the completed Survey went to the CEO for signature. Scores tended to be higher on the third administration because the question about 'Board' responsibility was generalised to senior management responsibility for environmental performance (such as the CEO). This suited New Zealand companies better, but lost the force of the original question. The question was re-introduced in the fourth administration, with a subsequent dip on that score for some companies. However, the average score for the group is the same [6.9], and this is attributable to the fact that scores on other questions continued to improve. That problematic question was changed in 2003 for a new question on 'Governance'.